Australian Consumers' Association November 1994

CHOICE

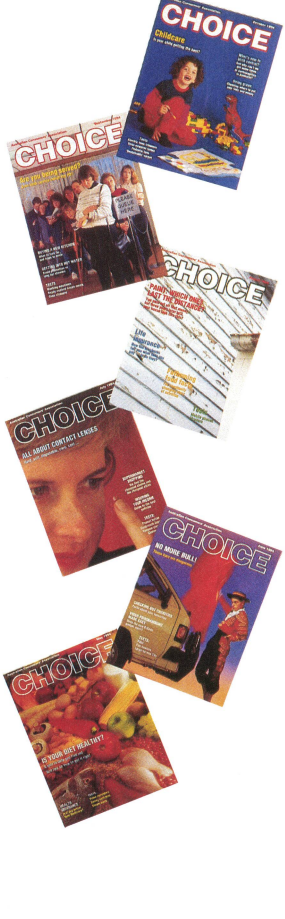
WASHING MACHINES REVEAL ALL!

Look inside for the full story

CHILDCARE – PART 2
How to find quality care

AIDS TO AN EASIER LIFE
Appliances that help living with a disability

TESTS
Food processors
Baby monitors



Who are we?

CHOICE EXISTS TO HELP YOU MAKE DECISIONS. It might be a question of which washing machine or fridge to buy, or which insurance policy or bank account to choose. It might be a case of giving you enough information about areas such as health, food and nutrition that you feel confident your decisions are based on sound knowledge. The reason you can rely on CHOICE is that the only interests we represent are yours — the consumer's.

We're not a government department or agency, and we get no ongoing funding from any government. Neither do we receive any subsidies from industry, manufacturers, unions or any other group, and we don't take any advertisements in the magazine. CHOICE survives purely because people like you subscribe to it: over 85% of our income is from CHOICE subscriptions, and the rest from sales of our Consumer Bookshelf and CHOICE Books, plus some special technical services such as testing appliances for their energy efficiency labelling. So we're independent in the true sense of the word: beholden to no-one but the consumers we represent and who keep CHOICE alive.

The organisation behind CHOICE is the Australian Consumers' Association. This does more than just publish CHOICE: we represent consumers' interests at federal and state government levels as a balance to the influence of manufacturers and service providers. You can become a voting member of the Consumers' Association as well as a CHOICE subscriber if you wish. The small extra membership fee you pay demonstrates your commitment to the rights of consumers, and gives you a subscription to a second magazine — either *Consuming Interest*, our publication covering broader consumer policy, or *CHOICE Travel*.

Around 80 people work at CHOICE in roles ranging from processing your subscriptions to testing the appliances, answering consumer queries, writing the articles in CHOICE and *Consuming Interest*, and representing consumer interests in the public arena. We're here because you think you need us, you trust us and you're prepared to pay to keep us going.

What do we do?

Ask most people and they'll tell you what CHOICE does is test products. We certainly do, and most visitors to our premises are surprised by the size and the state-of-the-art technology of our laboratories. We've moved far beyond the 'three men and a dog in a tin shed' image of our early days over 30 years ago. Much of our testing is based on the requirements of Australian or international standards, but we never forget the realities beyond the lab. Our tests aim to answer real consumer questions about the products people want to buy.

But products don't stop at TVs and washing machines. A bank account or an insurance policy is a product too, and we apply our expert skills to analysing things like these with a view to getting the best deal for consumers.

As well as lobbying industry and government about product safety, we have major policy areas in which we set specific goals to be achieved on behalf of consumers. At present these major areas are food, health and money. We've been working with the National Food Authority on various guidelines for manufacturers, have been maintaining a watch and a presence on behalf of consumers in the ongoing debates about Medicare and health insurance, and have fought for and won better consumer complaints handling procedures in the insurance industry.

We also pride ourselves on getting things right — if we didn't you wouldn't be able to trust our recommendations for long. If we do make a mistake we print a correction as soon as possible — but we work very hard to avoid this happening.

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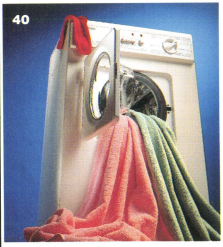
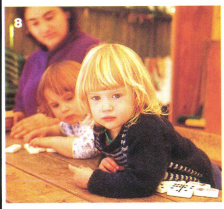


Cover photo: Kent Mears



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A well designed, safe and versatile food processor doesn't seem like too much to ask, but we found only one out of the 11 models we tested that fit the bill.

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It seems the nursery of the '90s isn't complete unless the baby has its own intercom to stay in constant touch. We found big differences in performance among the models we tested.

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In September we published the results of our washing machines tests based on a cold water wash. In this update we complete the picture, with results for larger machines and those models which weren't available in time for the September article.

Next issue

Security locks, champagne and sparkling wines, compost bins, chipper/shredders, a 'green' credit card, profile of the food market, dealing with your body corporate, CHOICE's Annual Buying Guide.

January, February, March

Tests: Hifi systems, insect repellents, timers, sunscreen fabrics, take-away sandwiches, video recorders, anti-scald devices, bread, exterior paint, CD players, sports drinks.
Surveys: Car reliability, car insurance.
Reports: Care for the aged, nutrient claims on food labels, guide to wood, food storage, living with a disability, electromagnetic radiation.

Electrical safety

SHOCKING STANDARDS

IT'S often said the need for consumer watchdogs like CHOICE has been eroded over the past couple of decades by our very success in achieving laws and regulations to protect consumers. There are now legislated consumer rights, ombudsmen's offices, trade practices laws and ministries for consumer affairs and fair trading. When it comes to product safety, there are exacting Australian Standards with which manufacturers must comply, ensuring all potentially hazardous products meet rigorous safety requirements. Right? Well, not quite.

The Standard relating to hair dryers (AS3304) came to our attention recently when we heard about Donna Saxon of Mount Martha, Victoria. She was injured when the hair dryer she was using shorted out. She was admitted to hospital and treated for electric shock, though a subsequent examination of the hair dryer at the Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector in Melbourne led officials to conclude she hadn't in fact been shocked, only burnt — small comfort, you might think.

The problem is very familiar to electrical safety authorities. Because of the way hair dryers are commonly used and stored, the constant flexing of the cord often results in 'work hardening' of the copper conductor inside. Eventually the individual strands of copper begin to break, so the current is carried by fewer and fewer strands. At a certain point it all becomes too much and a kind of 'meltdown' occurs. An officer of the Queensland Electricity Commission told us it was a "very common" problem and he knew of perhaps a hundred or more reports of similar incidents over the past few years, though he told us he'd never heard of an injury before.

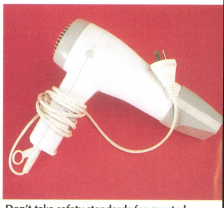
The problem is so common the standard for the cords was toughened last year. The flexing test they will have to pass has been considerably beefed up, theoretically forcing manufacturers to produce better cords to counter this problem. Previously they had to withstand 10,000 flexes through 90°; from the implementation of the amended standard it will be 20,000 through 180°. And when is that? When indeed.

Standards Australia's Electrical Approvals Standards Committee decided to give manufacturers 18 months to comply. That's to give them time to come up with safer cords — and to get rid of vast stocks already on shelves. Even when it takes effect — February 16 next year — there may be nothing to prevent the sale of products approved under the old standard. The manufacturers, virtually all overseas companies, have been asked to produce evidence that the products comply with the revised standard from that date. If they don't, however, it would be up to state authorities to test the products and prove they don't comply before approval could be withdrawn.

The regulations vary state by state; Queensland, for instance, only requires "substantial compliance" with the standard. Every state has its own approval scheme and legislation, yet a product approved in any state can legally be sold in all others.

We think this slow-acting mish-mash of safety regulations falls a long way short o adequate protection for purchasers of poten tially dangerous products. A committee set up to review the functioning of Australian stand ards as far back as 1987 mentioned criticism that the composition of Standards Australia committees, "if not well balanced ... may wel lead to standards which are not in the nationa interest" and alluded to "the possibility for .. producers in an industry to influence the con tent of a standard...". Perhaps the same may be said of periods of grace like 18 months to rectify a demonstrably perilous problem.

The Standards Australia Committee decided on the generous leeway in this case because the problem was not seen as one likely to result in injury. Mrs Saxon probably wouldn't agree.



Don't take safety standards for granted: manufacturers have 18 months to comply with a new one for hair dryers — and to sell off their old, less safe stocks.

Update

COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN

IN our August issue we published results of a test of analogue mobile phones, in which we gave some examples of call charges for both Optus and Telecom (*Downwardly mobile*, 'The cost of a call' on page 44). To put together the table of costs we contacted both Telecom and Optus and asked them to send us a copy of their latest mobile call rates.

Unfortunately Telecom's MobileNet public relations department sent us an outdated price list from August 1993. We were suspicious at the time of a price list that was almost a year old, but were assured on several occasions by a MobileNet spokesperson that this was the most up to date information available. Not so!

We've since found out that MobileNet's call prices had been updated in a brochure released in December 1993. Telecom has apologised for its error in sending us old prices and sent us the updated brochure. The only figures which are different from those we published are the off-peak rates for the **Flexi-plan 20**, which have dropped to be the same as the off-peak rates for the other two Telecom plans we listed. The table below gives the prices from Telecom's December 1993 brochure, which we are assured is definitely the latest available.

We can only repeat the advice from our August report; it's a rapidly changing market, so ring both Telecom and Optus to get the very latest prices before making a decision about which call charge plan to sign up with.

			LOCAL CALL		LONG-DISTANCE CALL	
Plan	**Recommended for**	**Monthly fee**	**First 30 seconds (peak/off-peak)**	**Subsequent 30 seconds (peak/off-peak)**	**First 30 seconds (peak/off-peak)**	**Subsequent 30 seconds (peak/off-peak)**
Flexi-plan 10	Low-volume users	$10	87 cents/14.5 cents	57 cents/9.5 cents	$1.20/20 cents	90 cents/15 cents
Flexi-plan 20	Low-volume users	$20	58 cents/14.5 cents	38 cents/9.5 cents	80 cents/20 cents	60 cents/15 cents
Standard	Moderate users	$35	29 cents/14.5 cents	19 cents/9.5 cents	40 cents/20 cents	30 cents/15 cents

DODGY

THOSE who read our June 1993 article on weight loss programs may remember the checklist it contained of questions to help you decide if a slimming scheme is worth taking seriously. The suggestion was that if the answer to even one question was 'yes' you should give the program a miss. The criteria included any claims the system was effortless, fast, new or revolutionary, didn't require exercise, let you eat anything you want, had a magic ingredient, etc. We've seen a few schemes promoted with some of these elements, but we've rarely run across one that had the lot.

That was until we came across the work of Dr Watson Walden, D.O. (could this mean Doctor of Obesity?), of Florida, USA. He is promoting a product — perhaps miracle would be more accurate — called ThermoSlim, now available to "Dear Friends down in Australia and New Zealand". We score it virtually 100% on the shonky claims scale. It breaks new ground we hadn't even thought of before.

The five-page letter from the good doctor that accompanies the brochure is a masterpiece of its kind. It takes the art of testimonials from ecstatic, newly thin people to new heights — "I've dropped 30 pounds ... I actually could feel at times my fat falling off me"; "I even lost weight through Thanksgiving and Christmas. I ate everything I wanted". It assures readers "we enlisted the support of only the most respected experts", but doesn't say who. It also neglects to mention what the miraculous ingredients are, but does say they cause "super high-speed weight loss by creating a condition called thermogenesis". This, "according to the most highly respected sources in the world, is the process of igniting your internal body heat at a tremendous rate", which sounds pretty scientific to us.

Whenever you feel hungry, says Dr W, "simply chew on a delicious ThermoSlim wafer and your hunger pangs will just disappear, as if by magic". Dieting and exercise are not required; in fact, "it's not even recommended". That's a relief.

Taking nutrition and dietary advice into exciting new areas, the product is not even available from any shop, pharmacy or supermarket, only "by referral" — which seems to mean sending Doc Walden a cheque for $65.95, via an address in St Kilda, Victoria. But wait ... there's more! You'll also get a "$24.95 FREE GIFT": presumably some smaller clothes.

If you're looking for a way to shed a few kilos, we don't recommend taking up this truly incredible offer

EVEN DODGIER

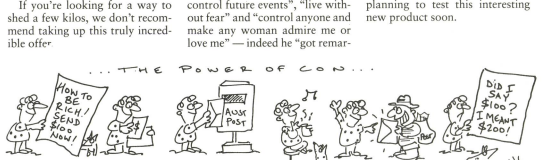
YET another American doctor has taken direct mail offers to realms not even dreamed of by masters like Dr Walden (see left). Dr Frank R Wallace (why does that middle initial lend such credibility to a name?) is the discoverer of the really very amazing power of the "universal unifying force — a cosmic power called Zon". You can read all about it in a dense, eight-page publication "from the desk of Jeff Hanson", possibly appearing soon in a letterbox near you. Jeff tells us neither what Zon is nor how his desk manages to write such long letters. Still, it's well worth the read.

The benefits of Zon — and its less potent but still impressive precursor Neo-Tech — make losing a couple of dozen kilos in an hour and a half look like child's play. They include the ability "to make $10,000, $100,000, even $1,000,000 cash ... in a matter of weeks or days!". The author, naturally, "did just that — sometimes taking in $100,000 a day, cash!"

He also learned to "predict and control future events", "live without fear" and "control anyone and make any woman admire me or love me" — indeed he "got remarried to one of the world's sexiest recording artists — can't tell you her name!" It seems she's as shy as Dr Walden's "respected experts".

It's somewhat hard to imagine why the masters of Zon should need your $128 — the asking price to share this impressive secret. It seems cheap at the price, however, since for that modest investment you get Zon III (controlling others), Zon IV (predicting stock prices) and Zon V (job power and sexual immortality). Jeff says it made him rich, "happy and ... totally free. All my dreams started to come true. It was awesome!" (We had a feeling he'd say that eventually.) In case you were wondering, he also "lost weight".

If you're looking for a way to control completely everyone you meet, make $100,000 or so a day without effort, achieve your wildest dreams of romantic love and sexual prowess, rocket to immediate and total success in the career of your choosing, win at cards, and, of course, lose weight, we doubt if Zon can help. We are not planning to test this interesting new product soon.



Update

RECYCLING AEROSOL CANS

(Oven cleaners, September 1994)

WE'D LIKE TO thank one of our subscribers who, upon reading our comments that aerosol cans can't be recycled, sent us information on steel recycling programs, which include aerosol containers.

Our apologies to the Aerosol Association of Australia — and to BHP Steel and the Canmakers' Institute of Australia, the initiators of a steel recycling program that includes aerosol cans. In June, the two organisations launched a major national drive to increase participation by local councils in household recycling of steel cans.

BHP Steel has told us since publication of the September article that more than 90 local councils in all Australian states are currently participating in kerbside collection programs which accept steel (including aerosol cans). We can't list them all here — ask your local council if it's part of the scheme. If it is and you want to recycle steel cans, empty them, remove the label if possible, wash them thoroughly and crush or flatten them (if you can!) before you put them out for collection. Aerosol cans should *not* be crushed, just emptied and plastic caps and spray nozzles removed.

Advertising

GREAT MOMENTS IN MARKETING

WHAT makes memorable marketing? This advertisement from a UK magazine caught our eye for its thoughtful approach to customer incentives.

As you can see, the ad is for funeral expenses benefits. "Funeral costs can be a worry ... Now there's a way to provide ready cash to help cover your funeral costs so your family or dependants won't be burdened."

There's nothing new in this type of plan, but the 'FREE GIFT' which accompanies the offer has a sensitive sound to it: "It's a Crown alarm clock radio and it's yours FREE when you join the Sun Life Funeral Cover Plan. It will be sent within 28 days from when you make your first tel monthly payment.

GUARANTEED CASH FOR FUNERAL EXPENSES
YOUR FREE GIFT
It's a Crown alarm clock radio and it's yours FREE when you join the Sun Life Funeral Cover Plan. It will be sent within 28 days from when you make your first tel monthly payment.
YOUR FREE G

No such thing as a free flight

"Now everyone can be part of an exciting reward program that's really taking off! The FLY BUYS program is the all-new way to earn free air travel — simply by doing everyday things like going shopping, buying fuel and using your credit cards! Imagine jetting off this time next year for a week in the sun …"

Hold it right there! Before you get too carried away with the pictures of tropical beaches and smiling families boarding planes, turn to the "abridged terms and conditions" section of your FLY BUYS application form.

The FLY BUYS program may seem free and easy on the surface but some of the terms and conditions of the deal are quite onerous. For instance, *"FLY BUYS may terminate a membership and cancel or bring forward the expiry date of points, make changes to the membership terms and conditions, and suspend or terminate the FLY BUYS program"*. In other words, there's no guarantee the scheme will exist long enough for you to be jetting off anywhere; and even if you do accumulate enough points, your membership can be cancelled under your nose.

Equally disturbing is the paragraph which reads: "Information concerning members, including information contained in the application form and information as to transactions resulting in points, credits and debits will be held in a database for FLY BUYS, and will be made available to agents involved in administering the FLY BUYS program including a telephone service centre, agents producing cards and points summaries and a data processing agent. Information from the database will also be made available to and used by FLY BUYS and participating retailers for marketing (direct and all other kinds), planning, product development, research and other commercial purposes."

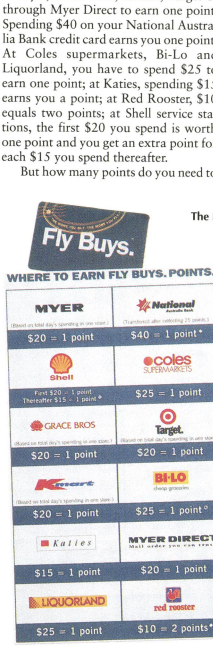
So, "The sooner you join, the sooner you'll be up, up and away", but will you be flying in a plane or floating on a pile of junk mail?

Another sticking point with the FLY BUYS program is that promotions are pegged at encouraging consumers to *buy more* — potentially more than they can afford.

For example, you have to spend $20 at Myer, Grace Bros, KMart, Target or through Myer Direct to earn one point. Spending $40 on your National Australia Bank credit card earns you one point. At Coles supermarkets, Bi-Lo and Liquorland, you have to spend $25 to earn one point; at Katies, spending $15 earns you a point; at Red Rooster, $10 equals two points; at Shell service stations, the first $20 you spend is worth one point and you get an extra point for each $15 you spend thereafter.

But how many points do you need to accumulate before you're actually entitled to fly for free? If you want to fly from Sydney to the Gold Coast, Brisbane or Melbourne, for instance, you need 850 points. How much would you have to spend at Coles supermarkets to accumulate that many points? $21,250.

The manager of the scheme, Loyalty Pacific, uses an example showing 'normal' patterns of expenditure to demonstrate how much you would have to spend at a number of retailers involved in the scheme to accumulate a certain number of points. It shows that by spending what they claim you normally would on groceries, petrol, etc (and we have to say their figures seem rather high to us), you could earn a total of 929 points in a year (see table below).



The FLY BUY points table — but by shopping around you could easily save the cost of an airfare.

IT'S EASY TO FLY FREE.

Type of spending	Spending example	With these companies	Earn these points per year
Groceries	$125 per week	Coles, Bi-Lo	260
Fuel	$20-$35 per week	Shell	78
Department stores	$120 per month	Myer, Grace Bros, Myer Direct	72
Discount stores	$60 per month	Kmart, Target	36
Ladies fashion	$120 per quarter	Katies	32
Car servicing	$500 per year	Shell	33
Takeaway food	$10 per week	Red Rooster	104
Liquor	$50 per month	Liquorland	24
Credit card purchases	$400 per month	National Australia Bank	120
BONUS POINTS	Inclusive	All companies	170
TOTAL			929

The danger for consumers is that they will spend more money with the retailers involved in the scheme at the cost of shopping around. Over the course of a year you could actually save more money by comparing prices and shopping around than the value of any frequent buyer points you may have accumulated by being loyal to FLY BUY retailers. For example, our annual supermarket survey (see CHOICE, July 1994) shows that Coles was the most expensive of all the supermarket chains. It was 2% more expensive than average, whereas Franklins No Frills was found to be 3% to 5% cheaper than average.

Using the FLY BUY figure of $125 per week for groceries, you would spend $125 x 52 = $6500 pa, and earn 260 points (one third of a trip from Sydney to Brisbane). Swapping to a supermarket which was only 3% cheaper would mean you spent $195 less, which is more than half the fare; if you could save 5% that would give you $325 towards it.

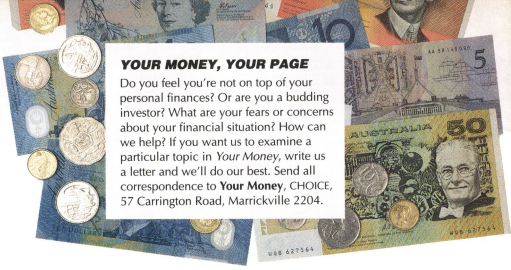
The moral of this story? If you care about your money, don't be too willing to give it away to schemes which may benefit the retailer than the consumer.

INSURANCE THAT HELPS

Community Aid Abroad (CAA) has entered what might at first seem to be an unlikely partnership with Ansvar Insurance to market CAA household and motor vehicle insurance policies. According to CAA, the policies have been developed for people with "highly developed social consciences".

The deal is that if you take out a policy, CAA receives a percentage of your premiums to use in its work supporting community development projects in Asia, Africa, the Pacific, Central America and in Australia with Aboriginal groups.

CAA chose Ansvar as its partner because the insurer is owned by its policyholders (defined as a 'mutual' company) and uses its profits for community programs, particularly focusing on alcohol awareness. For more information about CAA Insurance phone (toll-free) 1800 066 671 or write to CAA Insurance, c/- Ansvar, 20 Collins Street, Melbourne 3000.



YOUR MONEY, YOUR PAGE

Do you feel you're not on top of your personal finances? Or are you a budding investor? What are your fears or concerns about your financial situation? How can we help? If you want us to examine a particular topic in *Your Money*, write us a letter and we'll do our best. Send all correspondence to **Your Money**, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204.

Can you afford a higher mortgage rate?

LOW INTEREST RATES AND STABLE house prices combined with powerful marketing by the banks have encouraged many people to take out mortgages in recent years. But now mortgage interest rates are going up for the first time since 1989, and even a small rise in rates can leave your household finances in a mess if you're not prepared.

Only about 10% of all mortgages currently have fixed interest rates. That means most home loans have variable interest rates: if interest rates go up, your debt increases, and your repayments will go up too unless you extend the time of your loan. The interest rate you have to pay on a mortgage will be adjusted according to how much the bank has to pay for its funds on the money market. And the cost of funds on the money market is determined by the Commonwealth Government's Reserve Bank.

If the Government wants to slow down the economy by curbing the spending power of consumers, the Reserve Bank will push interest rates up. In turn, the banks have to pay more for their funds, so, at the end of the line, consumers have to pay more interest when they borrow money. If consumers are paying more interest on their home loans they have less money to spend on imports, for instance — this has a positive impact on the government's bookkeeping.

The latest rise in mortgage rates was triggered by the Reserve Bank's decision in August to increase the cost of funds by 0.75%. What impact will this adjustment in interest rates have on your monthly repayments? If you'd borrowed $100,000 when rates were at 8.75%, your monthly repayment (of principal and interest) on a 25-year loan would have been $822. If your bank increased its rates to 9.5%, your monthly repayment would be $874. That's an increase of $52 a month.

What impact would a further 1% increase have on your repayments? At 10.5%, the monthly repayment for the same mortgage would be $944. If you have borrowed more or less than $100,000, use the following table to work out what impact higher interest rates will have on your repayments.

Interest rate	Monthly repayment per $1000 borrowed	How much will it cost you?
8.75%	$8.22	
9.50%	$8.74	
10.50%	$9.44	

Source: St George Bank.

Multiply the figure in the second column by the amount in thousands you have outstanding on your loan (for example, if you have $84,580 outstanding, multiply $8.22 by 84.58 to come up with your monthly repayment — in this instance $695.25).

Completing this calculation will show you how much extra money you will have to find each month to meet your mortgage repayments if you have a variable home loan.

Some banking commentators fear there are numerous consumers who won't be able to cope with higher rates. *Your Money* will be bringing you more information on mortgages in future issues.

CHILDCARE CHOICES
PART TWO

The search for quality childcare

This is the second part of our major report on childcare in Australia. Last month we looked at the different types of childcare available and the advantages and disadvantages of each, what it costs and who regulates the industry. Our national survey of childcare users found a serious shortage of childcare services in rural communities and remote areas, and even people living in capital cities had difficulty getting the services they wanted. We also found that regulation of childcare is fragmented among Commonwealth, state and local governments, and that information about it and its funding is correspondingly scattered and hard for parents to find. On the positive side, our survey also uncovered many parents who had only the highest praise for the childcare they were using — although for many it wasn't the first service they'd tried.

This month we turn to the issue of quality of childcare. What is 'quality care', and how can parents assess their childcare options to make sure they make the right choices for their children and themselves? Our report discusses the issues parents need to consider and the kind of questions they need to ask to give them the best chance of satisfaction with the childcare they choose.

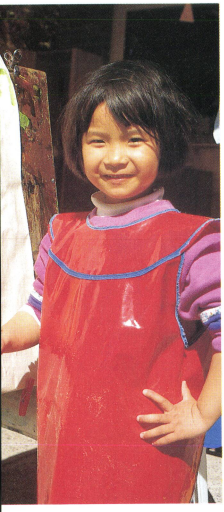
'Quality care' is now the catch-cry of the Australian childcare industry, but what exactly does it mean for parents? How can they tell the difference between good and poor services?

ONE PARENT WHO REPLIED TO the CHOICE childcare survey described choosing a service for her child as "the most difficult thing to do. A new parent, with no experience in the pitfalls of childcare, has to depend on gut feeling to find a safe and happy environment. There are no standards to help."

Unfortunately many parents would agree with this sentiment. When attempting to find the best childcare arrangement, they have to deal with a mixed bag of service providers in an industry that is at best fragmented and at worst an absolute mess. There are, for instance, 40 different 'associations' representing the interests of particular factions of the childcare industry. There are very few referral or placement agencies in Australia that can assist parents to find an appropriate service, and the small number of government information services are so poorly publicised that few parents know they exist — see *The search begins* for details.

The results of our survey show that, while the majority of parents are satisfied with their current childcare arrangements, those who are dissatisfied (or have been with previous arrangements) certainly have some serious reasons for feeling that way. Their survey responses indicate that there are some unsafe, unhygienic and substandard childcare services operating in Australia. But some parents, due to the shortage of childcare places — particularly for babies — have no option but to use these services.

Many parents are understandably unsure of their rights as consumers of childcare — what standards should you expect from services you're trusting (not to mention paying) to nurture, protect and educate your young children? What are the features you should be looking for when you visit different centres or services? The industry is divided, demand for childcare places still outstrips supply and sources of independent in-



formation are limited, but the news for working parents is not all bad.

The political spotlight is starting to shine on the childcare industry, which will receive $1.4 billion in government funding in the next financial year. In the years to come, if they want to keep receiving such enormous government support, the suppliers of childcare will be expected to do better at meeting the needs of their customers by providing high-quality services. The Commonwealth Government has already started a national Quality Improvement and Accreditation System for long-daycare centres (see page 14 for details) and it is hoped quality assurance programs for other types of service will quickly follow, so there should, eventually, be standards consumers can use to measure service quality. Meanwhile, there are steps you can take to assess the quality of various services *before* placing your peace of mind and your child's development, health and happiness on the line.

The search begins

Where do you go for initial information, and what factors do you need to consider when you visit a centre or carer to check them out?

THE FIRST PART OF THIS REPORT IN the October issue explained the role and structure of the various types of childcare service available in Australia, including family daycare, long-daycare centres, nannies, kindergartens/pre-schools, occasional care and out-of-school-hours care. Depending on where you live, all those options may not be available close to your home or workplace.

Your local council should be able to supply information about the types of service available. Other sources of information may be your baby health care clinic or state department of health or community services. There is also a branch of the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health in each state, which should be able to offer guidance about the availability and location of different types of childcare.

Once you know the range of services available in your area and you've decided on the most suitable type for your circumstances, it's time to start making contact with individual centres or schemes. Some sources say it's necessary to start contacting services as soon as you or your partner falls pregnant because of the shortage of childcare places, particularly for children under two years of age. On average, respondents to our survey had to wait close to four and a half months before obtaining childcare, but the longest time spent on a waiting list was over four years! The best services are usually the most difficult to get into, so the sooner you get your name on a few waiting lists, the better.

How do you decide which waiting lists to join? If you're in an area where childcare is scarce and waiting lists long, it may be necessary to have your name on every waiting list, perhaps even for a range of different types of service (a combination of long-daycare centres and family daycare schemes, for instance), but this is not the ideal. It's preferable to be able to assess and screen the services you're interested in, before deciding where to put your name down.

The parents who replied to our survey reported using a combination of methods to assess the suitability of different centres or services. The methods we do not recommend as sole indicators include relying on gut feelings (used by 34% of respondents) or basing your choice on a personal recommendation from family or friends (just under 50% of respondents). These methods of selection can be a starting point, but we recommend you also visit a number of services (55% of respondents did), so you can talk to and question the management and those directly responsible for caring for the children before choosing (just over 50% did this). Visiting services can be time-consuming but it's the only way to actively check a variety of factors about the quality of care they provide. You wouldn't buy a car without test-driving it, or purchase an expensive outfit without making sure it fits — we'd argue childcare services also need to be tried on for size.

Quality can be an extremely subjective term: factors which are very important to you may not be so important to another parent. It could also be argued there are dozens of things which go towards making a good childcare service — too many variables for any parent to assess properly by spending a small amount of time talking with staff or the family carer and observing how a service works. However, according to the parents who completed our survey, it's easy to come up with a list of the factors that are the most important when selecting care.

The thing our parents wanted most for their children was a **loving and caring environment**. Next, they wanted a service which was **located close to either their home or place of work**. Very close to this was the need to find childcare where they could feel certain about their **child's safety**. Several other considerations were frequently mentioned, including a **stimulating environment** and the need for **qualified/trained staff**.

Indicators of quality

There's more to quality childcare than hygienic premises and lots of toys — this section details what to look for and ask about.

Childcare experts would argue that only some of the considerations listed by our survey respondents are, strictly speaking, indicators of quality care. However, the thoughts expressed by our survey parents are closely related to a number of elements which have been identified by the experts as indicators of a quality childcare service. The key components which can make or break the quality of a childcare service are:

- The physical environment, including building design, size and design of play areas and equipment or, for family daycare, the size and suitability of the home.
- How the service is managed and staffed, including: contact between staff or carer and parents, staff/carer qualifications and training, and the way in which the staff/carer and children interact.
- The service's activities program: is child development a high priority?
- Adherence to health and safety guidelines; and
- Whether or not the service evaluates and improves its own standards on an ongoing basis.

In addition to enabling you to assess the quality of the service, finding out about these 'indicators' should also tell you whether or not a service is compatible with your personal beliefs. It will give you the opportunity to ask questions about discipline practices, feeding routines, religious practices, how special events are celebrated, and attitudes to toileting, social stereotypes and prejudices, as well as to ask questions about more practical factors which may influence your decision, including cost and hours of care available.

Let's now look at the main indicators of quality care in more depth. Once you have an understanding of what to look for in a service, our checklist (see *Questions to ask — your checklist* on page 16) can be used to ensure you remember which questions to ask and the elements of a service to pay attention to when making your visits.

The premises

Physical environment is extremely important, especially if you're assessing a childcare centre or the home of a family daycare worker. Parents need to check that children have sufficient space for both play and sleep (preferably in separate parts of the centre or home), appropriate equipment and that the centre or home is clean.

In a **family daycare** situation, check that children have enough space both inside and outside the house to play safely. There should be evidence that the family daycare worker has taken steps to make their home safe for children — for instance, by measures to keep them away from stairs, fireplaces or heaters. Each child should have a cot or bed and a place where personal belongings can be kept during the day.

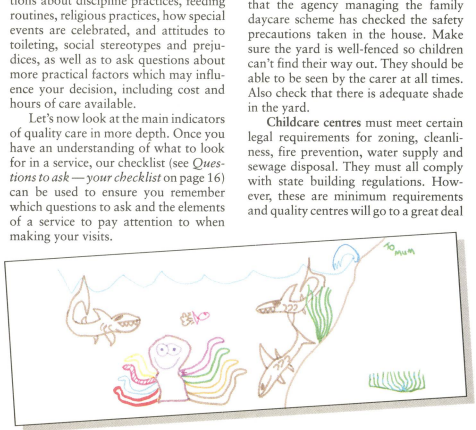
Ask the worker for written evidence that the agency managing the family daycare scheme has checked the safety precautions taken in the house. Make sure the yard is well-fenced so children can't find their way out. They should be able to be seen by the carer at all times. Also check that there is adequate shade in the yard.

Childcare centres must meet certain legal requirements for zoning, cleanliness, fire prevention, water supply and sewage disposal. They must all comply with state building regulations. However, these are minimum requirements and quality centres will go to a great deal of trouble to provide children with an environment that is stimulating as well as safe and clean. A good centre should have playrooms, lockers for the children to store their belongings, an appropriate number of child-size toilets and hand-washing facilities, a separate kitchen, utility room for cleaning materials and storage, and a staff room. Despite having all these facilities, a centre shouldn't feel or look like an institution. It should have a cosy atmosphere, usually achieved by dividing it up into a range of areas which can be used for different purposes.

There should be private areas for children to look at books or play by themselves if they want to. The centre should be planned so that children don't have to interrupt each other moving around within and between rooms and so the noisiest activities (like music) are not next to the quietest ones (books). Children should be able to see lots of images in the centre which reflect and relate to their everyday lives — things like dolls, tools for cooking, furniture, posters and paintings. Children's own work should be displayed around the walls at their eye level.

The only way to check these factors is to ask to see the room where your child would play (and where he or she would sleep) and to spend long enough in that room to observe how children are playing and interacting. It is critical to ensure that children have enough indoor and outdoor space because it's widely accepted that overcrowding and confined spaces can damage a child's development.

In our survey, 65% of parents said they were very satisfied with premises and another 30% were fairly satisfied. Probably the most important reason for satisfaction was "good facilities and equipment", followed by a "clean and safe" environment. One South Australian parent wrote: "The centre is set up in an old house with open rooms, excellent toilet facilities designed to help with toilet training, a large kitchen and excel-



lent play areas both inside and out. There are smaller rooms which are used to calm upset kids or to split large groups."

The small proportion of respondents who were dissatisfied with their childcare premises said this was because of "poor facilities and equipment" followed by the premises being "too small" and "not safe". One parent who said she was very dissatisfied with the premises at the service she used offered the following reason: "There is a lack of cleanliness. The [family daycare home] is currently overrun by mice and the grounds are very run down. The premises are dirty." This particular parent had no option but to accept this less than satisfactory arrangement — there were no other services available in her community for children under two.

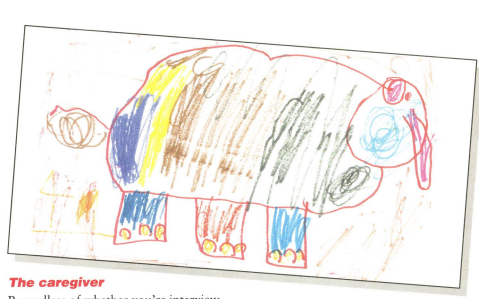
Toys and equipment

The child's physical environment should be filled with toys and equipment which are safe, stimulating and appropriate for their age and development. Young children learn through physical experiences — their play is their work and their education.

The equipment you observe in the centres or homes you visit should be safe. Check, for instance, that there are no steep slides or dangerous swings. If there is a sandpit, make sure it has a properly fitted cover. Equipment should also be durable, attractive and, of course, child-sized.

Around 65% of the respondents in our survey said they were very satisfied with the play and learning materials supplied by their childcare service. The principal reason for satisfaction was that the service had a "good variety" of equipment, which was educational and changed or updated regularly. A NSW parent wrote: "The long-daycare centre has an excellent array of playground equipment, toys, learning tools and books." A family daycare user, also from NSW, adds: "The learning materials and toys are always changed over at the daycare toy library so there's much more variety than I can provide at home."

The most common reasons for dissatisfaction were that there was a lack of materials or that children lacked stimulation and that equipment and materials were old. A less satisfied parent from NSW says: "I think the indoor equipment is satisfactory but the outdoor is not. There is only a sandpit, no swings or equipment to climb on."



The caregiver

Regardless of whether you're interviewing a nanny, family daycare worker or staff in a centre, you will want to know: what experience the carer(s) have had caring for children, whether they've had any formal training and why they're interested in the job. The personality, skills, training and childcaring philosophies of the individuals who will care for your child will have a major impact on his or her happiness and well-being in childcare.

Parents obviously want to find carers who will build their children's self-esteem, through warm, sensitive and consistent interaction and guidance. Carers should be experienced, but experience combined with formal training is the best bet. Certainly in large group settings such as kindergardens and long daycare, the carer(s) should understand and have been trained in child development.

When interviewing a family daycare worker or private nanny, observe how the carer and the children interact. Also attempt to find out if they have genuine feelings for children and experience in their care. Look for a caregiver who is relaxed and friendly and talks to the children in a warm way.

In a family daycare situation, ask both the carer and the co-ordinator of the daycare scheme about the level of support and monitoring the scheme's central agency gives to its workers. The most rigorous family daycare schemes have contracts with their carers setting out the standard of care that must be met.

If you're visiting a number of childcare centres, ask how many children each staff member has responsibility for (this is often referred to as a centre's staff/child ratio). Research shows that quality improves when there are smaller groups of children for each carer. Also check that your child will be able to establish a relationship with the same carer every day — this continuity of care is an important part of their childcare experience.

If possible, observe whether parents and children are greeted and farewelled by staff when they visit the centre. Another positive sign to look out for is that children receive lots of attention throughout the day — one-on-one, in small groups and occasionally in larger groups. Staff should appear to be equally as attentive during everyday routine activities like nappy-changing, meals and hand-washing times as they are during more special activities. At all times children should be spoken to with respect and affection, and whenever possible at eye level.

We asked parents a series of questions to measure their satisfaction with the staff of their current childcare service, and overall their responses were encouraging. We wanted to know if parents were satisfied that their centre or carer told them in full about events in their child's day, if they felt the program, centre or carer was responsive to suggestions or complaints. They were then asked how satisfied they were that staff were well trained and experienced, and that their children were cared for and cuddled enough.

Only half the parents were very satisfied that carers kept them informed about their child's day; another 38% were fairly satisfied and 11% were either uncertain or somewhat dissatisfied. Only 1% of respondents said they were very dissatisfied. We found similar levels of satisfaction when parents were asked about the way in which their service

responds to suggestions or complaints: 52% said they were very satisfied, 36% were fairly satisfied, 7% were uncertain, 4% somewhat dissatisfied and just 1% said they were very dissatisfied.

Almost 70% of the parents who responded to our survey said they were very satisfied that the people caring for their children were well trained and experienced, and another 25% were fairly satisfied this was the case. Likewise, most people were pretty sure their children were being cared for and cuddled enough during their hours in childcare — only 10% of respondents were either uncertain or somewhat dissatisfied with this aspect of their child's care.

Parental involvement

Interaction between children and their carers is extremely important, but a high level of parental involvement can also enhance the quality of a childcare service. Make sure parental involvement is encouraged or, at the very least, not discouraged by the services/carers you visit. Parents should be made to feel welcome to visit the service when they like, for instance. If you want a high level of involvement, look for a service that has parents on its management committee or provides some other structured way for parents to become involved.

Good for the child's development?

Centres should have a 'program' which offers a wide range of activities for different ages and for both individual and group play. Such a program is supposed to give children a framework in which they can develop at their own pace. High-quality centres may actually have a program or plan for each child in care. In addition, they will have a broad program which parents should be able to ask to see (if it's not on display). This should give you an idea of how each day runs, about the level of variety and choice your child would have during their day.

The activities in the program should be designed to encourage children to learn through creative activities like art, music, blocks, sand, crayons and water play. Part of 'quality care' is also that the service's program should demonstrate that it values cultural diversity, in addition to parental involvement and contact with the wider community.

In a family daycare situation, look for a house full of music, toys, puzzles and activities. Make sure the carer has a well-organised and stimulating routine for the children. Ask the daycare workers you interview how they divide up their day. Is there a balance of active and quiet play and flexibility to allow for individual differences? What experiences are planned for the children: shopping, cooking, picnics?

Childcare services which offer the best-quality care work hard to make sure they keep up their high standards. They continually assess and evaluate their programs and if they identify a weakness in their service, they find ways to improve it. At least once a year, parents and staff should involve themselves in evaluating the effectiveness of the service. They should review the program and look at whether the daily routines and the planned activities are working well for the children. Ask about the existence of such a review and quality improvement process, regardless of whether you're visiting a childcare centre or family daycare scheme. If you're interviewing a nanny, you may want to agree on a shorter assessment period.

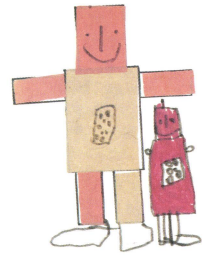
Health and safety rules

Parents naturally worry about the risk of children picking up viruses or having accidents while they're at childcare. However, quality services take steps to minimise such risks. The service (again, whether it's a centre or non-centre-based type of care) should have a set of procedures which have to be followed by staff to ensure good health and safety. There should be an emergency plan in case of accidents, easily accessible contact numbers for parents and at least one first aid-trained adult supervising children at all times. That means you should check that nannies and family daycare workers have first aid training before you hire them. Carers should keep up-to-date medical records on children which include details of accidents and children's medication. They should also wash their hands frequently, particularly after changing babies' nappies.

It should be easy for children to wash their own hands: cold water taps should be easy to turn on, sinks easy to reach and soap easy to use. Each child in a centre should have his or her own hand towel and toothbrush. The change table should be washed down between changes and dirty nappies kept in a sealed container. Babies' toys should be washed every day. Bathrooms, sinks and toilets should always be kept clean.

Check that meals and snacks meet any current nutritional guidelines you know of. Toddlers and pre-schoolers should be encouraged to feed themselves when appropriate; they shouldn't be forced to eat and fussy eaters should be catered for. Chairs, tables and eating utensils should be suitable for children. A good cultural mix should be reflected in the food the children are served. Food preparation areas should always be kept clean and meet other health and safety requirements (ask to see the kitchen).

Summing up



*Most parents **are** satisfied with their childcare, but for some it's been a long hard haul to get there. And for a few, the system has failed to meet their needs — and in the area of childcare, even one failure is unacceptable.*

OUR SURVEY RESULTS SHOW THAT most parents are satisfied, overall, with their current childcare arrangements. They have been fortunate enough to find childcare services which meet their needs and provide their children with quality care. Overall satisfaction was strongly related to whether or not the parent had a choice of service. Parents who did not have a choice were less likely to be very satisfied.

Almost 60% of parents said they *were* very satisfied. One such parent from Victoria explains: "I have full confidence in the management and staff, their abilities and caring attitude and their accessibility for all parental concerns. Our child is happy there." A family daycare user from NSW describes herself as "very lucky to have an exceptional carer who is a university-educated ex-teacher who is mature, loving and intelligent". However, another NSW parent who employed a live-in nanny to care for her child left nothing to luck: "I'm very satisfied because I took a great deal of care in finding an experienced and qualified person who is intelligent, loving and possesses a great deal of common sense. She was heavily reference-checked as well."

About 31% of parents said they were fairly satisfied. Many of them had glowing things to say about the services they used, but others had doubts about aspects of the quality of care. For instance, a NSW mother said there was a "lack of management within the centre, no planning and the staff are disillusioned. There has been massive staff turnover and the children are unsettled." Another parent, from country NSW, says, "I worry about the children getting through a broken fence as there is a main road close by".

Around 6% of parents who replied to our survey had serious misgivings about the quality of their current childcare arrangements. While this percentage is small, the problems they outlined on their survey forms are quite serious. They indicate that there are some parents who are being forced to settle for substandard care for their children. All three levels of government in Australia and the childcare industry in all its shapes and forms should be working, as a matter of urgency, to provide more and better childcare for Australian families.

The comments of dissatisfied parents also send other parents the message that it is extremely important, when you have a choice of childcare services, to shop around and assess the quality of a number of options before you make your decision. For instance, one mother from WA wrote about having to change her childcare centre after the following ex-

WHEN YOU'RE NOT HAPPY

Families who have a complaint about some aspect of a service or who want a decision reconsidered should be able to take the matter to the service's own complaints handling mechanism. This would enable mistakes on either side to be rectified quickly and easily. Each service should be able to develop internal systems like this for dealing with complaints, but at the moment there are no guidelines to assist such a development.

Even so, if you have any concerns, you need to talk to the caregiver or director of the service immediately. Be alert and concerned if you're not encouraged to drop in at any time, if your caregiver is frequently overwhelmed, rough, angry or moody, if there is insufficient staff to satisfy the regulations, or if children are ever left unattended. Also be concerned if your child shows signs of not getting enough attention (covered with food, mucus, dirt, nappy soiled or sodden) or signs of emotional or physical distress or suddenly behaves differently (withdrawn, appetite change, fretful, bedwetting, clingy). Your child may strongly resist staying at the service if there's something wrong.

Observe your child's behaviour carefully, and if they can talk, ask them what they would like changed. Make a time to see the caregiver or director away from the children, and present your case calmly. You need to give specific details about your concerns, to explain what you want to happen, be prepared to compromise if you can and talk about concerns as they happen. If you feel you can't resolve your concerns, you may be forced to withdraw your child from the service.

If the service can't resolve the complaint, the family should be able to go to an external dispute resolution body. At the moment there is no body set up to deal specifically with consumer complaints about childcare services. If the complaint is about a long-daycare centre, parents can go to the National Childcare Accreditation Council (phone (02) 299 1611; fax (02) 299 4435). If it's about a family daycare service, you will have to go to the administration unit of that service or, if you think the matter is serious enough, you could complain to your state department of health or community services or the Commonwealth Department of Human Services and Health.

The current structure of the childcare industry means it is not likely parents will be given a single national dispute resolution scheme in any hurry. There are, as mentioned earlier, 40 bodies within the industry, each one representing a particular faction (kindergartens, out-of-school-hours care, privately operated centres, community-based centres and so on) and attempting to advance the interests of the proprietors and staff in that particular faction. An extension of the concept of national childcare accreditation to other types of care is probably parents' only hope of ever getting a single and independent system for resolving complaints and disputes.

All three levels of government in Australia and the childcare industry in all its shapes and forms should be working, as a matter of urgency, to provide more and better childcare for Australian families.

perience. Fortunately she was able to do so with relative ease.

"After a staff change, my child had frequently been left in wet clothing when I came to collect him (sometimes poohed as well). No assistance was ever given to clean him up and I had no idea where anything was kept. Both my children were forced to watch *Play School* on TV every day (even if the weather was beautiful) in a cramped room with very poor reception. I had objected strongly to this. To appease me the 2 to 3 age group was to be given free play but the older children (3 to 4) had to watch it. After a week they were all watching it again. My youngest son was being negatively reinforced for his behaviour instead of positively, despite my requests that this practice be stopped.

"He did not respond well to this type of reinforcement and it made his bad behaviour more pronounced. After the staff change my youngest son brought home very little art work and very little was displayed for us on the walls. He loved craft but didn't seem to be doing any. The new carer was abrupt with the children and expressed little affection to them when talking to them, using a harsh tone continually with no benevolence shown. She was inflexible towards parents' requests and children's needs.

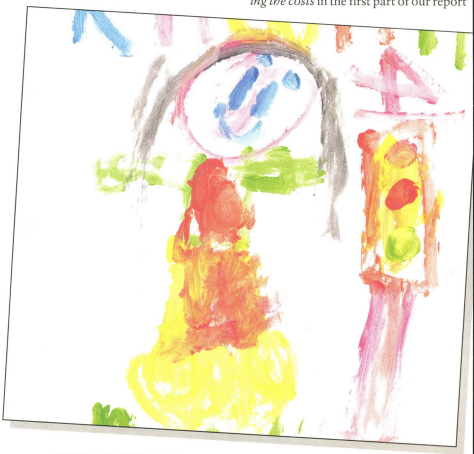
"I have found out since leaving this centre (from former staff) that the children were hit on the legs for discipline. Babies were left crying with no comfort until they fell asleep, be it 10 minutes or an hour or more. As a parent, I was very committed to the centre but when it came down to it we were treated as liars and troublemakers. I was hoping mine was a one-off occurrence but have since found out other parents pulled their children out for similar reasons. Yet nothing I said or did brought about any change."

Quality assurance in childcare centres

The first step in a long-overdue national approach to childcare, the Commonwealth Government's Quality Improvement and Accreditation System should help parents feel confident of quality care in long-daycare centres. Any other uniform system of assessment and standard-setting isn't even on the horizon at present.

THE NATIONAL Quality Improvement and Accreditation System, which came into being on January 1 this year, was set up by the Commonwealth Government to set standards for quality in childcare centres in what has, up till now, been a largely unregulated industry. Although childcare centres were licensed prior to the introduction of accreditation, the regulations focused only on buildings and aspects such as the number of children per staff member. They didn't prescribe any particular standard of care inside the centre — hence accreditation.

Instead of making the accreditation system voluntary, the government has tied it to the provision of Childcare Assistance. If a centre fails to register for the scheme, or registers but fails to meet the basic standards of care according to its guidelines after a period of about two years, Childcare Assistance (see *Counting the costs* in the first part of our report



for more information) will be withdrawn. This means the centre will have to charge higher fees, which may mean many parents would no longer be able to use it.

The scheme is administered by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC), which has set down 52 principles for quality improvement at long-daycare centres, be they community-based or private. They focus on ways to provide stimulating and positive experiences for all children in care. The result is a set of very open-ended guidelines, and when they were introduced in late 1993, there was a great deal of misinterpretation about the impact they would have on childcare centres. There were accusations that NCAC would order the removal of dolls and trucks from childcare centres when, in fact, the council was simply suggesting that not giving girls and boys the opportunity to play with a range of toys, and limiting them only to the stereotyped ones, may not help them develop to their full potential.

Accreditation is supposed to give parents and staff the chance to work together to improve the quality of care provided by the centre. Self-assessment by staff in consultation with parents is the basis of accreditation. Reviewers appointed by the National Childcare Accreditation Council will help centres to assess and achieve the standard required.

The 52 principles of good care on which the system is based (see right) cover four areas:

- Interactions between staff and children, staff and parents and between individual staff members.
- The program.
- Nutrition, health and safety practices.
- Centre management and staff development.

There are four categories for standards of practice in each of these areas: unsatisfactory, basic, good quality and high quality. For accreditation it is necessary to achieve at least 'good' in 20 specific principles and basic or higher in the other 32.

A cost estimate commissioned by the interim council put the costs of accreditation to centres at 80 cents per childcare place per week on a one-year basis, going down to 29 cents per week on a three-year basis. This is to cover components such as registration, resourcing and in-service training. In the first six months of the system, 85% of centres receiving Childcare Assistance registered.

THE PRINCIPLES AND STANDARDS OF QUALITY CARE

The National Childcare Accreditation Council's principles are set out below. Centres must achieve 'good quality' in the 20 red principles and basic or higher in the other 32 before they can receive accreditation.

1. Staff interactions with children are warm and friendly.
2. Staff treat all children equally and try to accommodate their individual needs: they respect diversity of background.
3. Staff treat all children equally and try to accommodate their individual needs: they treat both sexes without bias.
4. Staff use a positive approach in guidance and discipline.
5. Staff are responsive to children's feelings and needs.
6. Staff initiate and maintain communication with children, and their communication conveys respect.
7. Staff show respect for children's developing competence, and foster their self-esteem and independence.
8. Staff interact with children to stimulate their curiosity and thinking.
9. Staff create a pleasant atmosphere.
10. There is verbal and written communication with all families about the centre.
11. There is active exchange of information between parents and staff.
12. There is an orientation process for new children and parents.
13. Parents and other family members are encouraged to be involved in the program.
14. Staff communicate well with each other.
15. Staff show respect for other members of the team.
16. The program is planned to reflect the centre's philosophy and goals.
17. The program incorporates learning experiences appropriate for each child, as indicated by development records maintained by the centre.
18. The program gives children the opportunity to make choices and take on new challenges.
19. The program fosters personal and social development.
20. The program fosters fine and gross motor skill development.
21. The program fosters creative development and aesthetic awareness.
22. Toileting and nappy-changing procedures meet individual needs and are positive experiences.
23. Sleep time and dressing procedures meet individual needs for rest, comfort and self-help.
24. Mealtimes are pleasant occasions.
25. The program provides a wide range of individual and group experiences.
26. A daily timetable is planned to reflect children's needs, abilities and interests.
27. Procedures for routine activities are flexible and developmentally appropriate.
28. Transitions between activities are smooth.
29. The program fosters intellectual development.
30. The program fosters language development.
31. There is a balanced and developmentally appropriate program.
32. The program provides for children with special needs.
33. The program is regularly evaluated in the light of stated goals.
34. Staff are alert to the health and welfare of each child.
35. Staff try to ensure that children are clothed appropriately for indoor and outdoor play and for sleep.
36. Food and drinks meet children's daily nutritional requirements and are culturally appropriate.
37. Mealtimes promote healthy nutritional habits.
38. Food is prepared and stored hygienically.
39. Staff adhere to hygiene principles which reduce the spread of infectious diseases.
40. Staff encourage children to follow simple rules of hygiene.
41. Potentially dangerous products are inaccessible to children.
42. Buildings and equipment are safe and hygienic.
43. The centre maintains a record of children's immunisations.
44. The centre has written policies on hygiene, medical, emergency and accident procedures.
45. Staff are familiar with medical, emergency and accident procedures.
46. Staff supervise children at all times.
47. Information on health and other related issues is readily available to the staff.
48. Staff and parents consult on the program and evaluate it together.
49. New staff are informed about the philosophy and goals of the centre.
50. The centre provides regular learning and training opportunities for staff.
51. The staff roster is arranged to provide continuity of care.
52. Information about the centre's management is readily available to staff and parents.

Questions to ask: your checklist

Photocopy this checklist and take it with you to every childcare service you visit. You'll then be able to compare services in your own time after the visits. You'll probably want to add a few pages of your own notes too.

Name of service _____

Type of service (family daycare, long daycare, pre-school, etc)

_____

Address _____

_____

Phone number _____

Director/co-ordinator's name _____

Hours of operation _____

Holiday closures (Christmas, Easter, public holidays, child-free days) _____

Fees ($ per week, $ per day, $ per hour) _____

Is Childcare Assistance available? _____ Yes/No

What other types of funding does the services receive? (Commonwealth, state, local government) _____

_____

Are parents represented on the management committee? Yes/No

Is there a waiting list? _____ Yes/No

If yes, how long is it? (weeks, months, years) _____

Is there a fee for placement on the waiting list? _____ Yes/No

Are there adequate accident, medication and emergency procedures? _____ Yes/No

Is there someone on staff at all times with a current first aid certificate? _____ Yes/No

If a long-daycare centre, is it registered with the National Childcare Accreditation Council? _____ Yes/No

What is the child/staff ratio? _____

If a centre, how many qualified staff are there? _____

What qualifications does the caregiver have? _____

Does the service have public liability insurance? _____ Yes/No

How are children grouped (families, ages, other)? _____

_____

What meals are provided (lunch, morning and afternoon tea, late snack)? _____

Does the service supply: nappies (Yes/No), milk formula (Yes/No), sunscreens (Yes/No)?

Are the meal and sleep times planned but not too rigid? Yes/No

Are there guidelines for caring for/isolating sick children? Yes/No

If yes, what are they? Can you see a written copy? _____

_____

Are toys and equipment safe and in good repair? _____ Yes/No

Are fences and gates well-repaired and childproof? _____ Yes/No

Is the centre or home clean? _____ Yes/No

Do caregivers observe satisfactory hygiene practices, such as washing hands after changing nappies? _____ Yes/No

Are there enough play materials and are they made available daily, such as paint, dough, puzzles, blocks, etc? _____ Yes/No

Are songs, fingerplays and books an integral part of the child's day? _____ Yes/No

Do children appear busy, relaxed and happy? _____ Yes/No

Are the toys provided varied and age-appropriate? _____ Yes/No

Are toys within the children's reach? _____ Yes/No

If a centre, is there a daily program based on child development? _____ Yes/No

If yes, can you see a written copy of the program? _____ Yes/No

Is there a balance between indoor and outdoor play? _____ Yes/No

Are discipline practices clear, consistent and positive? _____ Yes/No

Are the centre's or carer's discipline policies/procedures compatible with your own? _____ Yes/No

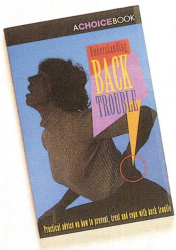
Do the caregivers talk with the children, call them by name, focus on positive behaviour, encourage creativity and independence? _____ Yes/No

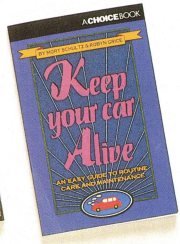
Are babies attended to when they cry? _____ Yes/No

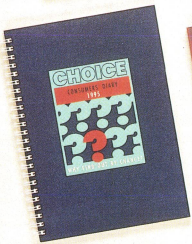
Are you welcome to visit the service at any time? _____ Yes/No

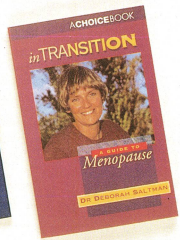
Can you be involved in the operation or management of the service if you want to be? _____ Yes/No

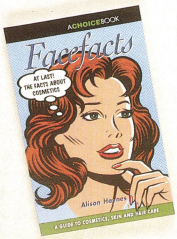
CHOICE BOOKS

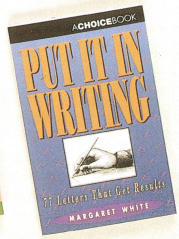












Understanding Back Trouble

Understanding Back Trouble offers clear advice on how to cope when you have back problems. It covers many topics including: how your back works and what can go wrong; how to cope with sudden back pain; when to call your doctor; examinations and tests; orthodox and alternative treatments; how to minimise back pain; exercises. *Understanding Back Trouble* provides invaluable advice about developing and keeping a healthy back.

$18 paperback 168 pp Code: UBT

Keep Your Car Alive

An Easy Guide to Routine Care and Maintenance

The key to having a car that ages well is to prevent trouble before it happens. *Keep Your Car Alive* supplies all the information you need about routine maintenance to keep your vehicle in optimum condition. An extensive checklist will help all car owners — first-timers or old hands.

$16 paperback 128 pp Code: KYCA

Choice Consumers' Diary 1995

Our popular diary returns for 1995. Conveniently sized (15 x 22 cm), it features: a week to an opening; a practical spiral binding that allows it to open flat on your desk; useful information and CHOICE consumer tips; monthly expense planners; 'to do' lists; a names and addresses section. **SPECIAL OFFER!!** Buy more than one copy and receive $1 discount on each additional copy.

$15 spiral-bound Code: 1995

In Transition

A Guide to Menopause

In Transition covers the issues surrounding menopause in a clear, easily understood, non-patronising way. Topics include: your relationship with your doctor; HRT; osteoporosis; cancer; heart disease; incontinence and prolapse; and conventional and alternative strategies for dealing with problems which may arise.

$17 paperback 184 pp Code: IT

Facefacts

A Guide to Cosmetics, Skin and Hair Care

Beauty choices for the discerning cosmetics purchaser. *Facefacts* guides you through the thickets of advertising claims and distinguishes the hype from the hard facts, explaining phrases like 'hypoallergenic', 'comedogenic' and 'natural'. It looks at many issues, including testing on animals, how the sun damages your skin, and how best to protect it.

$18 paperback 240 pp Code: FF

Put It In Writing

77 Letters That Get Results

We all know an effectively worded letter can get results. But quite often we give up before we start, because we don't know how to write the letter. This book contains 77 well-considered, cool and authoritative letters, written by a lawyer, which can be adapted to suit your situation.

$16 paperback 168 pp Code: PIW

CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Who Did That?

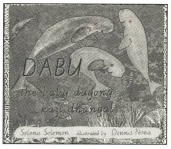
Who did that? presents the droppings and tracks of 10 native and one feral animal in Australia, each presented across two full pages. This is followed by concise and educational text about the animal's habitat and lifestyle, and a beautiful illustration of the animal by Jan Wade. This book allows children to discover more about Australia's unique wildlife in a fun and 'scatty' way. For ages 6 to 11.

$10 paperback 48 pp Code: WDT

Making... Friendship Bands

Originally from South America, friendship bands are given and received as tokens of goodwill and friendship — they are also very fashionable with both boys and girls. This book explains how to make your own friendship bands, including the equipment you need, how to tie the knots, and patterns for five popular designs. Also included is free thread to start a Rainbow design band straightaway. For ages 6 to 12.

$10 paperback 36 pp Code: MFB



Dabu the Baby Dugong

The story of a baby dugong in the waters of the Torres Strait. The story shows the close bond between a baby dugong and his mother and the joy and sadness in this relationship. *Dabu* is full of beautiful colour illustrations and is written in both English and Kala Lagaw Ya (the traditional language of the Western Torres Strait). For ages 6 to 10.

$20 paperback 48 pp Code: DTBD

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After the Greening

The Browning of Australia

This book traces the evolution of the Australian landscape from its green, forested state as part of Gondwana to its current state as one of the most arid landscapes on Earth. This beautifully illustrated and easily understood book is a geographical mystery tour and makes a wonderful gift.

$60 hardcover 288 pp Code: ATG

Master Works

How to Use Paint Finishes to Transform Your Surroundings

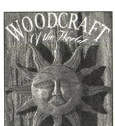
Practical and inspirational ideas and techniques for designing and decorating furniture, walls, floors and fabrics with wonderful painted finishes. Superbly illustrated, and covering many new and old techniques, this book will inspire novice and experienced practitioner alike.

$40 hardcover 182 pp Code: MW

Papercraft Gifts & Projects

Papercraft gifts are personal, different and inexpensive to make. There are many techniques and a variety of them are illustrated in this book, including: weaving, quilting, papier mâché, embossing, découpage and marbling. This is a book that has a dual purpose — as an aid to making original and personal gifts or as a beautiful gift itself.

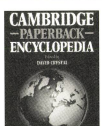
$25 paperback 160 pp Code: PGAP



Woodcraft of the World

This beautiful book can be used as a style guide or as a DIY handbook. *Woodcraft of the World* shows 11 international styles of woodcraft including German, French provincial, Australian colonial and Islamic fretwork. Also included are step-by-step instructions to creating 22 different items using these styles.

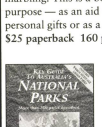
$50 hardcover 176 pp Code: WCOW



Cambridge Paperback Encyclopaedia

Updated in August 1994, this encyclopaedia delivers comprehensive, up-to-date information in a convenient single volume for both the home and the office. There are over 19,000 entries and an excellent 100-page ready-reference section at the back.

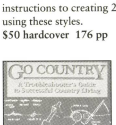
$25 paperback 972 pp Code: CPE



Key Guide to Australia's National Parks

Australia has a magnificent series of national parks and this book will help you to get the most out of them. Details include: how to get there; accommodation; walking trails; landscape details; geological formations and other features. This book is a perfect travelling companion or aid to planning your next holiday.

$27 paperback 304 pp Code: KGAP



Go Country

A Troubleshooter's Guide to Successful Country Living

Owning a block of land in the country is a dream of many people, but there are many practical things you must consider. For example, what makes a 'good' block; electricity; fencing; bushfire precautions; tools; machinery; animals and livestock. *Go Country* explains the practicalities of all these things in simple terms, with illustrations to help.

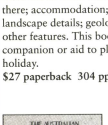
$25 paperback 240 pp Code: GC

Starware

The Amateur Astronomer's Ultimate Guide to Choosing, Buying and Using Telescopes and Accessories.

Astronomy is a hobby that is increasing in popularity. This book gives comparisons and advice on the ever-increasing range of equipment available for the home astronomer. It includes DIY projects designed to save money while still enjoying the pastime of astronomy, and a directory of suppliers.

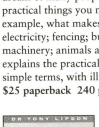
$40 paperback 374 pp Code: SAAG



The Australian Native Plant Gardener's Almanac

While being good for the environment and attracting native fauna, native gardens can be difficult to establish. This almanac helps by providing easy to understand material on what to do, when to do it, and which plant to put where. It includes illustrations, a further reading list and a useful list of native plant suppliers.

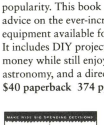
$20 spiral-bound 144 pp Code: ANPA



From Conception to Birth

The journey from conception to birth is probably the most amazing any of us will ever make. It is also one we don't remember. Dr Lipson's book develops this fascinating topic and includes diagrams, illustrations and pre-birth photographs.

$17 paperback 160 pp Code: FCTB



Is it a lemon?

The complete guide to buying a home, a car, a boat ...

This book won't make you a home, car or boat expert — but it may stop you making a big mistake. It provides basic information about what to look for when buying one of these three 'big-ticket' items, and includes diagrams and checklists.

$17 paperback 228 pp Code: IIAL

Full circle

The spring issue of *Consuming Interest (CI)*, our quarterly policy magazine, has a very strong international flavour. At the end of September, representatives of consumer organisations from around the world met in Montpellier, France. 'Consumers in the global market' was the theme for this week-long congress of the International Organization of Consumers Unions (IOCU).

CHOICE and *Consuming Interest* were there — it was a great opportunity to reinvigorate old and establish new friendships in the international consumer movement. The participants at the congress came from every nook and cranny of the earth, where they often deal with conditions which vary greatly from those in Australia, yet they shared many common goals: better information for consumers, safer products, environmental protection and legal redress.

Consuming Interest's spring issue tells the stories of consumer activists from some developing countries, who work for the rights of consumers under constant threat to their personal safety. Consumer rights which we take for granted in Australia are a long way from being established in countries where governments still don't recognise basic human rights.

Childcare: out of date and undirected

At home, the major topic for this *CI* is childcare — our article follows up those in October and November CHOICE, based on our major national survey. The lack and the cost of childcare are recurring themes on the Australian political and social agenda. The childcare services industry is out of step with the ever-changing times and demands on parents, appearing stuck in a 20-year-old mindset.

In this issue of *CI*, we take the veil off this service industry and expose it as being disjointed, outdated and with powerful factions at loggerheads. The *CI* article looks at the big picture behind the difficult choices parents have to make and concludes: "If the industry is interested in meeting the needs of consumers it will begin to offer integrated and flexible services at a reasonable price."

Consuming Interest calls for national standards for the provision of childcare so that consumers can place their children with confidence in services which guarantee high-quality care.

Credit, court decisions and health rights

Again looking in more depth at the subject of a recent CHOICE article (September 1994), the magazine puts the spotlight on the operations of the Credit Reference Association of Australia (CRAA), which claims about 95% of the consumer credit reporting business. *CI* highlights the weaknesses of current credit reporting: "For credit providers, the CRAA is only one instrument in the overall assessment of credit applications. But it's a blunt tool ..."

There is also the first of what will become a regular column in *CI* — 'Court in the act'. It gives a rundown of legal decisions which are of direct importance to the work of consumer organisations, focusing on court decisions under trade practices law. This issue we give the background to a landmark case in which price-fixing cartels were prosecuted and for the first time had multi-million dollar penalties awarded against them.

And there's lively discussion in the 'Opinion' section of the magazine. For example, the campaign for a national health rights charter has received a boost with the recent adoption of the Newcastle Declaration by consumer organisations and many health care providers. This statement for, and a plan of action to achieve, a legislated Australian health charter will be a point of debate for health care consumers for a long time to come. ❑

Childcare: *CI* looks at the big picture behind the choices parents have to make.

Equipped for an easier life

We look at a few of the many products now available that are designed to make life easier and more enjoyable for disabled and older people.

WITH ADVANCING AGE MANY people need assistance with everyday activities. Sight and hearing may deteriorate, joints become stiffer and co-ordination and balance poorer. But don't despair! There's a host of products available, from simple kitchen gadgets to technologically advanced computer systems, which can help senior citizens — as well as disabled people of all ages — achieve greater independence and a better quality of life. Specially designed equipment (such as lifting aids) can also reduce the strain on those looking after sick and disabled people at home and improve the well-being of both patient and carer.

Independent Living Centres

Where can you find these aids? A great place to start your search is an Independent Living Centre. Each of the six states and the ACT has an Independent Living Centre (ILC) housing a large permanent display of equipment relating to all areas of daily living for adults and children. Each centre is staffed by therapists who can assess individual needs and provide impartial advice on commercially available products.

In the NSW centre we visited, more than 2500 items are on display, ranging from double-handled cups and easy-to-grip scissors, cutlery and taps to motorised lounge chairs, electric scooters, stairlifts, continence aids and long-handled gardening tools. ILC staff can also provide ideas on designing your home to improve access and safety for people with particular disabilities. Books and videos on kitchen and bathroom modifications (and other disability-related subjects) are available, as well as a quarterly journal, *Independent Living*, which gives up-to-date information on equipment and resources — particularly useful for people living in the country.

Each ILC also has a phone, fax and letter advisory service. The NSW ILC, for example, has information on more than 8000 items, including suppliers and approximate costs. Although ILCs do not manufacture, sell or hire products, they do maintain files of companies with equipment for hire.

To ensure that a therapist is available to assist you in trying out the equipment and help you choose the products best suited to your needs, make an appointment first by contacting one of the seven Independent Living Centres:

■ **ACT**
24 Parkinson Street, Weston 2611
Phone: (06) 205 1900

■ **NSW**
600 Victoria Road, Ryde 2112
Phone: (02) 808 2233

■ **Queensland**
Newdegate Street, Greenslopes 4120
Phone: (07) 394 7471

■ **SA**
180 Daws Road, Daw Park 5041
Phone: (08) 276 3455

■ **Tasmania**
46 Canning Street, Launceston 7250
Phone: (003) 345 899

■ **Victoria**
52 Thistlethwaite Street
South Melbourne 3205
Phone: (03) 254 5400

■ **WA**
3 Lemnos Street, Shenton Park 6008
Phone: (09) 382 2011

SOLVING A TAD TECHNICAL PROBLEM

Three-year-old Ben, left paralysed in both legs after being injured in a car accident, is racing around again, thanks to TAD. That's Technical Aid to the Disabled, a voluntary organisation dedicated to designing and making aids for disabled people with special practical needs. Ben needed a hand-operated tricycle to be able to get around and play with his friends. No such item was available commercially, so TAD volunteer Malcolm Wheatley (pictured here with Ben and his sister) built this nifty red number for him.

TAD members make no charge for their labour, but where possible the client covers the cost of materials. There are TAD organisations in all states and territories, so contact them if you have a disability and need a particular device to help you at work, home or play — or if you'd like to offer your technical expertise.

By the way, you don't have to be disabled or elderly to benefit from a visit to an Independent Living Centre. During our visit, a truck driver was assisted in trying out various backrests in his vehicle to find one which would provide support and prevent backache during his long hours behind the wheel.

IDEAS

Another source of information for people in country areas, particularly in NSW and Victoria, is IDEAS — Information on Disability, Equipment, Access and Services (phone toll-free 008 029 904). As well as a computerised list of equipment and suppliers Australia-wide and other useful contacts, IDEAS (located in Tumut, NSW) has a large library of books and papers on disability which can be borrowed by mail.

Hiring, trying, buying

Many pharmacies offer a range of useful aids and also have equipment for hire. Bear in mind, however, particularly if you're seeking a costly item, that often only one supplier is involved, so choice may be limited.

And although you can find a list of suppliers (who may also hire out equipment) in your Yellow Pages directory, it really is best to get objective advice on choosing the most suitable equipment. It's a good idea to consult an occupational therapist or physiotherapist through your local community health centre or hospital (where equipment may sometimes be lent out or available to buy) — or visit the Independent Living Centre first before contacting your chosen supplier. And always make sure you try before you buy.

Financial help

Customised equipment can be costly, though if it makes your everyday life easier and more enjoyable, the outlay is worthwhile. If you can't afford the equipment you need, you may qualify for government assistance. Various schemes operate in each state, but a means test (as well as a medical assessment) is often involved and the amount given varies markedly according to the location and the government body involved.

The government supplies some items, such as hearing aids, free of charge to people with specific disabilities. (See CHOICE, April 1994, for further details on hearing aids and services.) People with a permanent disability may also be eligible for a free Telecom home phone and other attachments to meet their special needs. For more information about Telecom's Aged and Disability Services contact your local Telecom office.

Disabled people seeking work may be eligible for special assistance through the Commonwealth Employment Service or Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service. The CRS may assist with the purchase of essential workplace aids and modifications as part of a total rehabilitation program. If the person's job is in jeopardy because of the disability, it may provide the equipment necessary to maintain employment, though the employer may be required to contribute to the cost.

Self-help groups for specific disabilities, such as paraplegia, cerebral palsy, arthritis or stroke, are a good source of information and support. Some organisations, including a number of those serving the vision-impaired and hard-of-hearing, also have displays of equipment and information on suppliers. And many

ON THE MOVE WITH A MEAN MACHINE

University lecturer Helen Meekosha loves the independence her new Australian-made electric scooter has given her. It's suitable for indoor and outdoor use, so now she can speed across the campus and do a wheelie into the library, motor down corridors and zoom up hills. No longer is it difficult to get to meetings or visit friends.

Electric scooters aren't cheap: Helen's model cost $4500 (comparable in price with the cheapest electric wheelchair). However, Helen was fortunate in receiving financial assistance with the purchase from her employer and the Commonwealth Rehabilitation Service. An occupational therapist from the CRS also arranged for her to test drive available models. "Whether you're choosing a wheelchair or a scooter, you've got to insist on a long test drive before you buy, just as you would before buying a car," says Helen. "It's got to be comfortable, easy to drive and stable."

People with disabilities are really on the move now, according to Helen, and she's not slackening her drive in lobbying for improved access (including ramps and automatically opening doors) for wheelchair and scooter users.

Helen, who has weak limbs, poor co-ordination and low vision, as well as speech problems if she's exhausted (all as a result of multiple sclerosis), has made many visits to the Independent Living Centre and Royal Blind Society to view their equipment. Among the aids she uses at home are tap-turners, a kitchen knife with an easy-to-grip vertical handle and an ergonomic chair. A large-print computer, bookholder and light with a magnifier have also proved invaluable and occasionally she uses a speech synthesiser.

people have benefited from consulting the Continence Foundation of Australia, which offers a program of special exercises to help overcome the problem as well as a variety of continence aids.

We'll examine the range of services available for elderly people in need of care in CHOICE early next year.

Buyers' tips

You can make tasks around the home easier and safer by using some of the specially designed products you can see displayed at Independent Living Centres and by choosing standard appliances carefully. Some suggestions:

- Make sure the controls of standard appliances are easy to reach, grip or turn. Buttons or touch controls should be large and well-spaced.
- Check that labels and digital displays are clear and easy to read.
- Choose products that are not too heavy and are easy to clean.
- Choose chairs that are easy to get in and out of (not too soft, nor too low). Armrests are useful.
- If replacing taps, choose the lever or capstan types which are easier to turn.
- If you have trouble managing buttons and zips, choose clothing that is easy to slip on (tracksuits, for example, or skirts and trousers with elasticised waistbands) or consider asking family or friends to replace fiddly hooks and buttons with Velcro. A limited range of clothing with Velcro fastenings is displayed at the ILC.

Avoiding disability

For older people, immobility brought on by a fall often means the end to independent home living. Disability can often be avoided by taking some simple precautions. For example:

- Install grab rails in the bathroom and toilet and at the front and rear doors of your home.
- Replace slippery floors and uneven paths. Use slip-resistant flooring and surface coatings.
- Remove loose floor rugs and use a rubber mat in the bathroom.
- Where possible, substitute ramps for steps.
- Avoid shoes with slippery soles.
- Use night lights in passageways, bedrooms and toilets.
- Store food, clothes, etc, where they can be easily reached.
- Minimise the use of chairs and stepladders to reach heights.
- Talk to your doctor about adjusting or substituting your medication if it makes you dizzy or faint.
- Exercise regularly to improve your fitness and balance.

A study in South Australia indicated that an investment of about $85 (in night lights, grab rails and treatments for slippery surfaces) could halve the incidence of elderly people falling.

BRIGHTER OUTLOOK FOR THE VISION-IMPAIRED

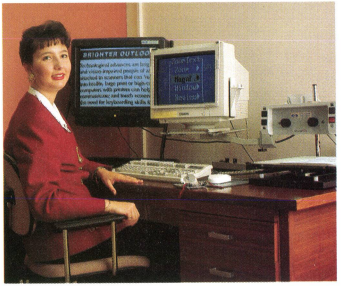
Technological advances are brightening the outlook for blind and vision-impaired people of all ages. Computers can be attached to scanners that can 'read' regular text and convert it into braille, large print or high-contrast magnified print; computers with printers can help people with a hearing loss communicate; and touch screens and voice activation reduce the need for keyboarding skills for those with dexterity problems. Innovations such as these have created a wider range of employment opportunities for people with various disabilities.

Pictured here is 23-year-old Stephanie Peebles, who at the age of 17 lost 85% of her vision within three weeks due to a degenerative eye disorder. Although her central vision is now only 5% and she is legally blind, Stephanie doesn't feel disabled. Modern technology has helped her make the most of her remaining sight. In her job as personnel officer at the Sydney branch of the Royal Blind Society, she uses a closed-circuit television to magnify print for reading and writing as well as a computer with large print.

Organisations such as societies for the blind (the name varies from state to state) are helping to demystify technology for vision-impaired people by offering training to develop computer skills. You're never too old to learn how to use a computer, according to 81-year-old Harry Harding. When Harry lost most of his sight in his 70s, it seemed he could no longer read or write. But thanks to training from the Royal Blind Society in NSW, he's once more enjoying reading and writing and is happily tapping out his autobiography using a large-print computer.

A wide variety of aids is often displayed at agencies for the blind and vision-impaired. With more than 90% of clients having some vision, the emphasis is on making the most of remaining sight. Among the products on show are large-print, braille or talking watches, telephones with large or tactile numbers, large-print playing cards, writing aids, signature guides and sewing equipment.

As at Independent Living Centres, staff at the agencies can provide ideas, advice and useful contacts. Some, like the Sydney branch of the Royal Blind Society, also have a library of talking books and offer transcription services.



If you have poor vision:

- Use a bright, adjustable desk lamp, with the light below eye level (to reduce glare) for close work, such as sewing and reading.
- Choose large-print products (such as a calendar, clock, phone). A magnifier may also help.
- Look for large-print books in your local library.
- Use bold contrast to make things easier to see (for example, use a black felt pen to write instead of a blue biro; put white cups on a brightly coloured placemat and dark objects on a white surface; place brightly coloured stickers on appliance buttons).

Around the house

You can get specially designed small and large appliances to make life easier around the home if you're elderly or have a disability. On these two pages we show just a few of the most broadly useful ones.

Some aids for people with impaired vision: large-print playing cards, a talking calculator, a braille clock, watches with large numbers or braille, a phone with easy-to-see numbers.

The Leisure Lift motorised lounge chair ($1550) makes standing up easier.

You can keep on gardening with implements like a garden fork with 'back saver' handle, a garden 'trovell' (half trowel, half shovel – around $50 – with a big easy-to-hold handle), and the 'Kneel and Sit' aid to kneeling and standing up (around $120).

There are plenty of gadgets available to help you in the kitchen — we can only show a few.

In the bathroom: a raised toilet seat, grab rails, various styles of seat for showering, non-slip mat. You can also install a hoist and sling to move someone in and out of the bath.

The Shopper Walker ($270) — it has brakes, a basket and a seat to help on shopping trips.

Lingerie with a difference

THE SIGN ABOVE THE DOOR IS quaint and innocuous enough — *Bras and Girdles*. The small poster in the window of another lingerie store — *La Femme Mastectomy Boutique* — gives more away.

Both shops, one in the inner city of Sydney and the other in the business district of Perth, cater for the same clientele. They specialise in breast prostheses (artificial breast forms) for women who have had one or both of their breasts removed to stop the spread of cancer. They not only sell the artificial breasts but also help women choose the proper bra to keep these inserts in place. They offer modern swimwear specially designed to hold breast forms, giving women the freedom to go to the beach without running the gauntlet of curious eyes staring at their chests.

But there is something else which both stores have in common and which is as important as the professional and technical expertise of the staff. After all, they are not just in the business of selling sexy underwear and attractive bathing suits. They are serving women who have been through a major traumatic experience and feel very vulnerable. As any woman will tell you who has been through the stress and fear of cancer diagnosis, surgery and radiotherapy and/or chemotherapy treatment, she has to come to terms with losing a part of her body inextricably linked with being a woman.

There is increased recognition that women who have had a mastectomy need special support services. Women with breast cancer have to be able to choose their prostheses in a discreet and supportive environment.

Julie Jenyns, who together with her mother runs a company that is one of the major suppliers of breast prostheses in Australia, also offers staff training workshops. She says, "Some women like to go to a little boutique to choose their prostheses; others have always shopped in a big department store. Whatever they feel most comfortable with, they shouldn't have to change their shopping habits."

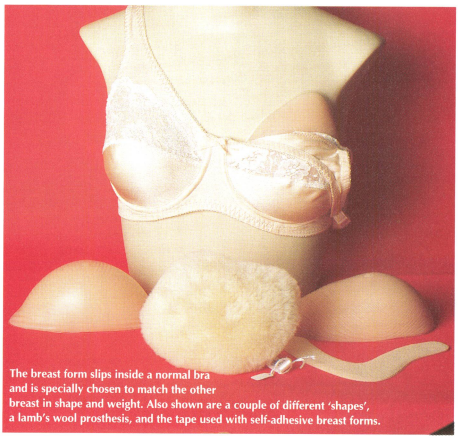
So, no matter whether you go to *Bras and Girdles* or *La Femme Mastectomy Boutique*, to David Jones in Sydney or Myer in Melbourne — you can be pretty sure someone will attend to you who is trained and also sympathetic to your specific situation and emotional needs.

The bra's the thing

"Your prosthesis can be diamond-studded — it's worthless if it doesn't sit in a properly fitted bra." Leila O'Toole is a corsetiere and professional fitter of breast prostheses in Sydney. She says, "For the prosthesis to feel comfortable it needs a 'substantial' bra, but that doesn't mean it has to be ugly and old-fashioned." Leila doesn't sell any bras specifically designed for breast prostheses. Rather, she makes sure the women who come to her wear bras fitted perfectly to their size.

Women who wear breast prostheses want to feel good about their appearance. The forms need to be comfortable, easy to put in and take out, and they should reproduce the shape and proportion of the breast that had to be removed. Still, it's not only about looks and fashion.

Staff at breast cancer support services will also tell you there is a health issue at stake — prostheses are about balancing the weight of the remaining breast. If they're not balanced, your shoulders can move out of alignment, putting such pressure on the spine that it can cause problems with posture. This means it is only slightly built women who are usually able to continue using a temporary breast form such as the ones provided immediately after surgery;



The breast form slips inside a normal bra and is specially chosen to match the other breast in shape and weight. Also shown are a couple of different 'shapes', a lamb's wool prosthesis, and the tape used with self-adhesive breast forms.

most need to buy a well fitting, permanent one.

Even if the first prosthesis is still in good condition, there might be a need to buy a new one. Significant weight gain or loss or aging might have altered the size and weight of the remaining breast.

On the beach

The breast cancer support services in each state and territory are a good starting point for any woman who wants to find out where she can purchase swimsuits which hide her prosthesis.

The news is good — there are now such cozzies on the market and they look pretty swish. The difference between them and an 'ordinary' one-piece swimsuit is hardly noticeable. The ones for prostheses have special pouches sewn into the bodice, their neckline is higher and the shoulder straps close tighter under the arms to cover any scars. A band across the back holds the prothesis firmly against the chest. They are fairly expensive and are available from dress sizes 8 to 24. One word of warning — when you go into a heated spa, take out a silicone prosthesis!

Who pays?

Breast prostheses are not cheap: the silicone ones cost between $170 and $400. Some are guaranteed for two years, most for only one. There is no Medicare rebate for them. If the breast surgery has been performed in a public hospital, the hospital might contribute (between $150 and $180) towards the cost of the first prosthesis.

Finding out who might qualify under what scheme for which co-payment for what type of prosthesis is a mammoth task — not only does each state and territory have different regulations, the rules vary even from hospital to hospital and they are constantly changing. As a member of a private health fund you might get some of your expenses back. Again, the best source of updated local information is the cancer councils and their breast cancer support services (see *Ring for sympathetic advice*, right).

A prosthesis for all seasons?

Breast prostheses made from silicone have been around for several decades in Australia. Their sizes range from tiny to very large. Because no two breasts are the same, the shape of the prosthesis is important. Each of the 16 different shapes comes in about 13 different sizes. The most modern breast forms are firm on the side against the chest (simulating your own chest muscles) but flow soft on the outside.

Swimsuits are specially designed to hold the breast form firmly and hide any scars, but are still stylish.

The choice of prosthesis is also influenced by the type of surgery. The 'symmetrical triangle', for example, is advertised as appropriate for women with a short scar and the 'asymmetrical special' is better for women with a relatively long scar. Any store — mostly the lingerie department — which sells breast prostheses should have a broad range in stock, so women can choose at leisure.

One type of prosthesis is self-adhesive. The breast size and shape are the same as in the inserted ones but they come with adhesive straps to stick to the skin.

Most women can have a prosthesis fitted about six weeks after surgery. For obvious reasons, self-adhesive ones are only advisable when the wound is healed completely. Lamb's wool is particularly kind to skin which has had surgery; for a prosthesis, a sack is made from lamb's wool then filled with more of it (for shape) plus some granulated fibreglass (for weight). Leila O'Toole says, "Ideally, a woman should have a silicone and a lamb's wool one," because "lamb's wool is very good for absorbing perspiration — they are excellent for women who live in hot climates or do sports or work hard physically." ❑

RING FOR SYMPATHETIC ADVICE

There are breast cancer support services all across Australia. They give sympathetic advice to women who have had breast surgery — you can ask them about prostheses and where to buy them, about which private health insurance gives what refund, about where to go for help with lymphoedema (swelling of the arm nearest to the place of surgery due to damage to the lymphatic system), about where to buy fashionable swimwear which holds the prosthesis and about anything else you might want to know.

- **ACT:** Shirley Fitzgerald, ACT Cancer Society, 15 Theodore Street, Curtin 2605; phone (06) 285 3070, fax (06) 285 3221.
- **NSW:** Robyn Wicks, NSW Cancer Council, 153 Dowling Street, Woolloomooloo 2011; phone (02) 334 1900, toll-free 008 422 760, fax (02) 357 2676.
- **NT:** Sue Hearn, NT Anti-Cancer Foundation, Shop 24, Casuarina Plaza, Casuarina 0810; phone (089) 27 4888, fax (089) 27 4990.
- **Queensland:** Suzanne Steginga, Queensland Cancer Fund, William Rudder House, 553 Gregory Terrace, Fortitude Valley 4006; phone (07) 257 1155, fax (07) 257 1306.
- **SA:** Margaret Tobin, Anti-Cancer Foundation of the Universities of SA, PO Box 929, Unley 5061; 202 Greenhill Road, Eastwood 5063; phone (08) 291 4111, fax (08) 291 4122.
- **Tasmania:** Maureen Ramsden, Tasmanian Cancer Committee, PO Box 1864, Launceston 7250; phone (003) 34 0311, fax (003) 31 6433.
- **Victoria:** Suzanne Bottomley, Anti-Cancer Council of Victoria, 1 Rathdowne Street, Carlton South 3053; phone (03) 279 1111, fax (03) 279 1270.
- **WA:** Carol Bishop, Cancer Foundation of WA, 334 Rokeby Road, Subiaco 6008; phone (09) 381 4515, fax (09) 381 4523.

A fragrant pause

THERE ARE MANY COMPOUNDS IN ordinary daily use that we know precious little about. If they've been used for a long time with no apparent harm it can be difficult to justify the time and expense of really getting to know their peculiar ways.

One group of household compounds has come in for attention recently following research from a number of organisations. Called **nitro musks**, they've added fragrance to products like cosmetics, detergents and soaps for more than 20 years. They're also used as flavouring agents.

According to a report in the highly regarded UK magazine *ENDS Report*, a number of studies have revealed a nasty side to nitro musks in terms of their effects on the environment and possibly on our health.

■ Perhaps the most commonly used nitro musk, musk xylene, has been found to cause tumours in laboratory mice; another, musk ambrette, has been observed to be neurotoxic in mammals and mutagenic in bacteria; and they are structurally similar to nitrotoluenes, a group of compounds known to have toxic and mutagenic properties.

■ They persist in the environment and are poorly biodegradable. A study of sewage effluents in Tokyo found raised levels of nitro musks in fish and shellfish.

■ Studies in Germany revealed "significant levels of nitro musks in human milk". How did they get there? It's believed "the major exposure route was not food intake but absorption through the skin from detergent and cosmetic products".

Overseas, the fragrance industry challenges this research while debate continues as to whether the use of these compounds should be discontinued. For

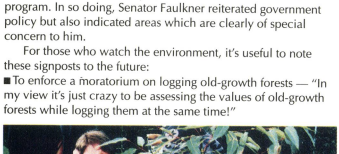
THE FEDERAL AGENDA FOR THE ENVIRONMENT — REINTERPRETED

Senator John Faulkner became federal minister for the environment following the departure of Ros Kelly from the Arts, Sport and Environment portfolios.

Three months into the job, the minister announced his program. In so doing, Senator Faulkner reiterated government policy but also indicated areas which are clearly of special concern to him.

For those who watch the environment, it's useful to note these signposts to the future:

■ To enforce a moratorium on logging old-growth forests — "In my view it's just crazy to be assessing the values of old-growth forests while logging them at the same time!"



Senator John Faulkner, federal minister for the environment, helps plant a tree — but there's a lot more on the country's environmental agenda than just tree-planting.

■ To put an end to the export of woodchips by 2000 (though not an end to woodchipping old-growth forests and processing the timber here).

■ To implement a national biodiversity strategy.

■ To assess further areas of Australia for nomination as having world heritage value. "I am keen to assess the Tarkine and extensions to the existing Tasmanian World Heritage Area," said the minister.

■ To develop an agreed set of national indicators of the state of the environment. "This will show changes and trends in environmental conditions in much the same way as well-accepted economic or social indicators … like interest rates, employment levels, or the CPI." It will act like a 'report card' on the condition of the environment.

■ To seek to work co-operatively with state governments on environment strategies but, where co-operation fails, to "use whatever means are available to me as the federal environment minister" in order to meet national environmental goals.

■ "Land degradation is one of our most serious national environmental problems … While much has been done we need to do more," said the minister. Beyond saying this will take "more energy and more resources", nothing new or more concrete was announced.

Some of these issues are bound to bring the minister under fire from a whole range of lobby groups. "I will not be ducking from dealing with any environment issues," said Senator Faulkner.

example, their possible exclusion from the European Community's proposed eco-label program is currently being debated.

The soap industry is gradually moving away from using nitro musks — you now have to look to developing nations to find the manufacturing plants.

What's happening in Australia?

We contacted the largest soap companies for their views on the matter. "We are familiar with the issues that have been raised about the safety of nitro musks," says Peter Isherwood, General Development Manager for Lever Rexona. "Our specialist toxicologists at our Environmental Safety Laboratory have reviewed all available safety data and have concluded that in their expert view nitro musks, when present at the low levels found in detergents and personal products, do not constitute any threat to human health.

"Nevertheless ... we have made a decision to stop using any perfumes that contain nitro musks. We have already adopted perfumes free of nitro musks for those products that have the potential for greatest exposure — that is, all products which are left on the skin. We still use perfumes containing nitro musks in some of our toilet soaps and fabric softeners but will be adopting alternative nitro musk-free fragrances for these products over the next few months and expect to be completely free of nitro musks about the end of the year."

Colgate-Palmolive endorses this view. "We are now actively working with our fragrance suppliers to ensure that no new fragrances are compounded with nitro musks," says Corporate Affairs Manager Geoff Walsh. "In addition, we have commenced the process of removing these substances from any existing fragrances that may contain them. We expect this process to be complete within 12 months."

It's a continual and slow process — and a 'luxury' in these productivity-driven times — to put valuable time and effort into better understanding household chemicals which have been with us for so much of our lives. But such environmental and health research can put a different complexion on the cosmetics, soaps and detergents we use so freely. ❑

The 14th CHOICE Subscriber Draw

For new subscriptions and renewals received October 1 to December 31, 1994

Subscriber draws are now held quarterly and on January 4, 1995, we'll be holding our fourteenth. The lucky winner will be able to choose any two products from the following tests, published April 1994 to June 1994.

- ☐ Microwave ovens — medium-size (April)
- ☐ Video recorders (May)
- ☐ Safety switches (May)
- ☐ Steam irons (May)
- ☐ Televisions — 68 cm (June)
- ☐ Fan heaters (June)

These are products we bought for testing, so you won't be the first to turn them on or set them up. But we'll cover any service problems with a CHOICE warranty that'll match the manufacturers' — just as if you'd bought them new.

All new CHOICE subscriptions and renewals received from members and personal subscribers (including donors of gift subscriptions) by December 31 will go into the draw, unless of course you indicate you don't want to be included.

(If you're not due to renew your subscription during the period, don't worry, we'll be holding other draws during the year — your renewal notice will have the details. And if you're on a two-year subscription you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you renew again.)

✍ Use the order form overleaf ☞

Congratulations to Gerry Watts of Templestowe, Victoria, the winner of our 12th subscriber draw in July this year. Gerry has been subscribing to CHOICE for more than 20 years, so it was a pleasure to offer him the choice of two products from recent test articles. He chose a Fisher & Paykel electric wall oven to replace his current 10-year-old model, and a Rover Combat lawnmower.

Gerry finds CHOICE a handy reference source and, until recently, kept every issue since his first subscription. In a clean-out about two years ago, however, he parted with all but the last five years' worth.

We hope Gerry gets a lot of tasty dinners from his new oven. Once again, congratulations to him and we hope he enjoys CHOICE for many more years to come.

CONDITIONS OF ENTRY

1. The winner will be drawn from new subscriptions and renewals from personal subscribers (including members and donors of gift subscriptions) received October 1 to December 31, 1994. If you opt for a two-year subscription, you'll be entered on your first anniversary as well as when you actually renew or subscribe.
2. Information on how to enter and prizes forms part of these conditions of entry.
3. Employees, and their immediate families, of the Australian Consumers' Association and its associated companies and agencies are ineligible to enter.
4. Entrants must be residents of Australia.
5. Applications are subject to a verification check and the judge's decision is final. No correspondence will be entered into.
6. The prizes will be delivered free anywhere within Australia.
7. Prizes cannot be taken as cash.
8. South Australian residents may enter the draw by completing the form and posting to: Reply Paid No. 24, ACA, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204, without subscribing to the magazine. Only one entry per person is permissible through this method.
9. Last date for receipt of entries to the draw is December 31, 1994. No responsibility accepted for lost, late or misdirected mail.
10. The draw will be conducted at the office of the Consumers' Association at 10 am on January 4, 1995.
11. The winner will be notified by letter and published in the earliest feasible issue of CHOICE after that.
12. The promoter is Australian Consumers' Association, 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville 2204. NSW Permit No. TC94/4398 issued on 2/9/94, Vic Permit No. 94/2911 issued on 2/9/94, ACT Permit No. TP94/1811 issued under the Lotteries Ordinance, NT No. NT94/1485.

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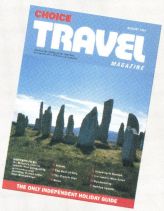


Do you need a good holiday?

CHOICE Travel takes you behind the brochures and gives honest, down-to-earth advice on where to go, what's to do there, and how to get the most out of your travel dollar.

Travel is produced by the UK Consumers' Association and reprinted by CHOICE four times a year. While its reports are from the perspective of a European base, much of the information in them is just as useful to an Australian travelling in Europe and the USA, with occasional forays further afield. There's quality information about different regions, accommodation, specialities of local cuisine, sights to see, as well as places to avoid and tips on dealing with holiday hassles.

A subscription to *Travel* costs just $27 a year — you can use the form on this page to subscribe. The latest issue features:

- Southern Italy
- Athens
- The French Alps
- Western Isles of Scotland
- Channel Tunnel

FOOD PROCESSORS

A well-designed food processor that's safe and able to perform all processing tasks equally well, and without spillage, still seems a distant concept. Most of the 11 models we tested had problems with one or more tasks, but we did find one good performer at a reasonable price.

FOOD PROCESSORS CAN BE A godsend for people who regularly prepare meals for crowds or large families. If you use them for all the tasks they're claimed to be able to do, you'll save considerable time on food preparation — and you won't need a number of other kitchen appliances such as hand-held mixers, blenders or choppers.

For this test we chose benchtop food processors priced below $150, a segment which comprises about half of the models available on the Australian market.

THE BIGGER THE BOWL ...

As food processors in general are particularly useful for bulk food preparation, we thought the capacities of the processing bowls and/or blender attachments would be quite important for potential buyers, especially as they differ considerably. The 11 models we tested ranged in claimed maximum capacity (for liquids) from just one cup (250 mL) to one litre.

When we tested with water, only four in fact held the maximum liquid volume as claimed on the carton or in the instructions. However, only the **BLACK & DECKER Short Cut FP33** and the **RONSON Gourmet Chef 8341** had difficulty coping with our standard recipes for liquid foods.

Some of the manufacturers commented that their product's claimed capacity refers to the overall volume of the bowl rather than the quantity that can be processed. So if you intend to use a food processor regularly for blending soups or milkshakes, be aware that a claimed 1500 mL capacity, for example, does not necessarily mean you can make 1500 mL of soup in the bowl.

Considering that people may buy one model rather than another because of its supposed larger capacity, we think these claims are at least confusing, if not misleading. In one of our recent surveys, subscribers identified leakage from the bowl as one of the major problems they had experienced with their food processors. Perhaps there'd be less confusion about capacity if processor bowls were clearly marked with the maximum liquid quantity they can process without spillage, as some models were.

We chopped, sliced, shredded and grated hundreds of carrots, cucumbers, potatoes, salami ... and found just one food processor that's a good all-rounder.

CONTINUOUS FLOW OR BATCH PROCESSING?

All the models we tested had a processing bowl which is fitted with blades for chopping and mixing food and separate cutting discs for other operations. On all but the **SUNBEAM Oskar II LC 026**, these discs can be used to slice and shred smaller amounts of food straight into the processing bowl, conveniently and with little mess (called 'batch processing'). However, if you're preparing larger amounts of foods, or your food processor only has a small bowl, you have to disassemble the unit regularly during processing to empty the bowl. A continuous flow attachment can overcome that problem. It allows you to shred, slice or chip food straight into a larger container of your choice.

Among the models we tested, the **BLACK & DECKER** and the **RONSON Gourmet Chef 8341**, both with rather small processing bowls, have a continuous flow option, and with the **SUNBEAM** you can only shred and slice into a separate container. While it's good to have the option of batch or continuous flow processing, the latter has its downsides, as our tests revealed.

Soft food generally tended to come out looking mushier or was stuck together, perhaps because it had to 'travel' further. Overall we found continuous flow processing much messier than batch processing. All three models with this feature tended to throw out the food all over the place. And it meant more washing up afterwards, as some food was also thrown into the processing bowl.

WHAT ELSE TO LOOK OUT FOR

■ The heavier a model, the more stable it generally is. That's a plus if you use it

regularly and have sufficient space on a benchtop to leave it out permanently, but a disadvantage if you store it in a cupboard and take it out for each use.

■ More power does not necessarily mean better performance. Factors such as sharpness and shape of blades, thickness of shredding or slicing discs, and the consistency of the food being processed all influence how well a food processor copes with various tasks. If the motor sounds laboured the food processor is stressed — and needs a rest. Switch it off for a while before continuing.

■ Some feeder tubes have two chambers — one large and one small — rather than one single chamber. This design makes it more versatile.

■ A pouring lip on the processing bowl makes transferring fluids easier.

■ We included an evaluation of the instructions in our ease of use score, as they're particularly important. They should cover safety, assembly, operation and some recipe hints, but with the models we tested, we found many lacking in content and design. Some were quite misleading and others contradictory. If you can't achieve a certain result according to the manufacturer's recommendations, use common sense and experiment. For example, we found it necessary to experiment with the recommended times to whip cream properly with the MOULINEX **Masterchef 470** and the BRAUN.

Conclusion

As the top-performing **PHILIPS HR2871** was also one of the cheaper models we tested, it's our recommended **Best Buy**. It moved about a fair bit during kneading, but that seems to be fairly common; none of the others stood still during the more difficult processing tasks. Some couldn't cope well with slicing and shredding, others with mixing liquids, but only one had problems with most food processing tasks, the **RONSON Multi Chef 8346**. However, this was also the only one which could grind coffee in the blender attachment.

If the **PHILIPS** doesn't have the features you want, check the profiles of other OK models on the right.

BEST BUY

PHILIPS HR2871 ..... $89

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

People with dexterity problems, arthritis, poor eye-hand co-ordination or reduced vision need a food processor that is especially easy to assemble, to lift and to operate. In this case, they don't have to pay more or buy a model that performs less well. An occupational therapist from the NSW Independent Living Centre found our recommended **Best Buy**, the top-performing **PHILIPS HR2871**, particularly suitable for people with disabilities. It is easy to assemble; its large control is easy to see and to operate and it's light enough to be lifted with one hand. Compared with the other models we tested, you're probably less likely to injure your hand on the reversible slicer/shredder blade as it's very easy to remove and replace.

If you're after a particularly small and lightweight model, the **BLACK & DECKER Short Cut FP33** also met the assessor's criteria.

SAFETY STILL AN ISSUE

FOOD PROCESSORS are potentially dangerous. While all the models we examined passed electrical safety tests and complied with Australian safety standards, our tester could easily touch the slicing and shredding blades with her fingers when she put her hand into the feeder tube. Of course, all instructions warn you *never* to push food down the tube with your hand when the machine is on. But it can easily be done when you're absent-minded, when a piece of food stubbornly sticks to the side of the feed tube and can't be moved into the right position with the food pusher.

When we last tested food processors we suggested manufacturers make the feeding chute just a little bit longer and hence safer. But more than four years later none of the models we tested appeared to us to have been improved significantly in this respect. On the contrary, food processors can be potentially dangerous in other respects as well.

The **BLACK & DECKER Short Cut FP33**, for example, with its on-off control on top of the machine, can be switched on by accident quite easily while the user is still positioning food by hand. Such an act could have disastrous results.

Then there's the time it takes before the blades stop moving when the machines are switched off or the lids are removed. All 11 models we tested are protected with an interlock system, which means the blades will stop moving if the lid is opened during operation. The **BRAUN Multipractic Plus Basic** was safest in this respect: its blades took less than half a second to stop rotating. As another precaution, its lid, and those of the **PHILIPS HR2871** and the **KENWOOD Gourmet FP101**, couldn't be opened while the machine was on.

This is just one potential hazard of using a food processor: maybe it's time manufacturers gave their whole design a rethink.

These are good safety features, but they have to work reliably. We recently heard of a woman who suffered permanent disfigurement of her left hand when the lid of her food processor bowl came off during operation, but the motor kept running.

When the manufacturer examined her food processor, she was told she had stored it incorrectly, in the 'locked' position, which would wear out the interlock mechanism. She had not been aware of this; instructions to this effect only appeared in the storage section of the instructions manual.

If it's really that important to store an appliance in a certain way, it should have clearly visible warnings to this effect on the food processor, especially if long-term storage contrary to instructions could have safety implications.

Statistics show that food processor-related injuries are not uncommon. The National Injury Surveillance Unit, which collects data from hospital emergency departments, is aware of 82 injuries (almost half involving children and almost a quarter under five) that occurred in recent years which involved domestic benchtop food processors. However, only about 50 hospitals are participating in the data collection program, so across Australia this figure must be much higher. And, of course, there may be many more accidents treated outside the hospital system.

PROFILES
Profiles are listed in rank order. Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994. Anything lower is a bargain.

PHILIPS HR2871
Target price: $89
BEST BUY
Good points
■ Best overall, and the best at its basic tasks: processing food.
■ Very easy to assemble.
■ Good instructions.
■ Particularly good at slicing and shredding.
Bad points
■ Tended to move a lot during kneading.
Special features
■ Cord storage, hole in food pusher for adding liquids.
Optional accessories
(according to manufacturer)
■ Five additional discs of various thicknesses for slicing, grating and chips; potato peeler attachment.

BRAUN MULTIPRACTIC PLUS BASIC UK9
Target price: $129
Good points
■ Best at chopping and mixing.
■ Easy to assemble.
■ Good seal between blade and blade shaft made cleaning easier.
Bad points
■ Had problems slicing some foods — in particular salami.
■ The instructions: in our tests, some mixing, chopping, slicing and shredding tasks worked better at different speeds or for different lengths of time than recommended.
■ Tended to move during kneading.
Special features
■ Chipping disc, measuring cup on food pusher, cord storage, safety interlock.
Optional accessories
(according to manufacturer)
■ Heavy-duty kneading attachment, grain mill, spin juicer, citrus press, whisk and cream bowl, scale, 'completion set' with wide feed tube for processing whole fruits and vegetables.

Braun Multipractic Plus Basic UK9
Kenwood Gourmet FP101
Moulinex Masterchef 350 B 66
Breville Cyclonic Wizz Micro FP-8
Ronson 8336
Black & Decker Short Cut FP33

BREVILLE CYCLONIC WIZZ MICRO FP-8
Target price: $129
Good points
■ The easiest model to use.
■ Good at grating potato.
■ Very good controls and instructions.
■ Heavy, but also the most stable among those tested.
Bad points
■ Had problems slicing some foods.
■ Tended to wobble during kneading.
Special features
■ Pouring lip on bowl, measuring cup on food pusher.
Optional accessories
(according to manufacturer)
■ Citrus press.

KENWOOD GOURMET FP101
Target price: $99
Good points
■ Good at mixing.
■ Whisk attachment made whipping cream easy.
■ Very easy to assemble.
Bad points
■ Had problems slicing some foods.
■ Tended to move around or wobble when chopping chicken and kneading.
Special features
■ Whisk, 'maxi-blend canopy' to assist with blending or mixing liquids, cord storage.
Optional accessories
(according to manufacturer)
■ Various additional discs for rasping, fine shredding and slicing, chipper, dough tool, citrus press, attachment holdall.

RONSON 8336
Target price: $129
Good points
■ Good at slicing and shredding.
■ Good controls.
Bad points
■ Difficult to lock and unlock bowl into place.
■ Tended to move or wobble when chopping chicken and kneading.
Special features
■ Chipping blade, blender jug, measuring cup on food pusher.
Optional accessories: None

MOULINEX MASTERCHEF 350 B 66
Target price: $95
Good points
■ Good at mixing.
■ Turbo kit made milkshake very frothy.
■ Emulsifier disc worked well for mayonnaise.
Bad points
■ Had problems slicing some foods.
■ Slicing and shredding blades fiddly to change and awkward to clean.
■ Tended to wobble and move a bit during kneading.
■ Not much detail in instructions.
Special features
■ Double food pusher, whisking disc, mixer/blender 'crown' ('turbo kit') to assist with blending or mixing liquids, cord storage, hole in food pusher for adding liquids, measuring cup on larger food pusher, cord storage.
Optional accessories
(according to manufacturer)
■ Chipper blade, large and thin grating blades, accessories storage box.

BLACK & DECKER SHORT CUT FP33
Target price: $69
Good points
■ Best at slicing among the models tested.
■ Metal food holder made slicing and shredding easier for firm foods, but was less useful for soft foods.
■ Good instructions.
Bad points
■ Signs that motor was stressed during certain, more difficult tasks such as slicing carrots and kneading.
■ Had problems mixing liquid foods without leaking; most other processors we tested could cope with the quantities we used.
■ During continuous processing, tended to throw out food away from the outlet and into the processing bowl as well.
■ Continuous feeder cover awkward to clean.
■ Could be switched on easily by accident.
■ Tended to move when chopping chicken, kneading and mixing cake.
Special features
■ Continuous-flow option, measuring cup on food pusher, food holder.
Optional accessories: None.

Food processors

Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price ($)*	1 Type	Weight (kg)	Cord length (m)	2 Noise (dB)	3 Number of speeds
PHILIPS HR2871	Philips	Netherlands	89	Batch	2.0	1.42	79	1
BRAUN Multipractic Plus Basic UK9	Braun	Germany	135	Batch	3.0	1.53	80	2
BREVILLE Cyclonic Wizz Micro FP-8	Breville	China	129	Batch	4.5	0.98	72	1
KENWOOD Gourmet FP101	Breville	China	99	Batch	2.4	1.21	80	1
RONSON 8336 *(A)*	Ronson	Taiwan	135	Batch *(C)*	3.5	1.00	84	2
MOULINEX Masterchef 350 B 66 *(B)*	Moulinex	France	99	Batch	2.3	1.05	78	1
BLACK & DECKER Short Cut FP33	Black & Decker	China	70	Batch and continuous flow	1.9	1.13	82	1
RONSON Gourmet Chef 8341	Ronson	China	80	Batch and continuous flow	1.8	1.76	80	1
MOULINEX Masterchef 470 B 67 *(B)*	Moulinex	France	100	Batch	2.3	1.06	76	4
SUNBEAM Oskar II LC 026	Sunbeam	France	109	Batch and continuous flow *(D)*	1.4	0.90	83	1
RONSON Multi Chef 8346	Ronson	China	109	Batch *(C)*	3.1	1.07	83	1

All models have a one-year warranty for defective materials and workmanship.

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994.

(A) This model was recently discontinued; see *Melted plastic and wrong instructions* for why we've included it in the table.

(B) This model was discontinued last month but may still be available in the shops.

(C) Plus blender attachment.

(D) Batch processing for mixing and chopping only; also blender attachment.

(E) Processor bowl not recommended for liquids.

(F) Including special lid.

CHOP TILL THEY DROP

WHAT HAPPENS if you let a food processor run for five days — on, off, on, off, on, off — as if it were in constant use? Although this is hardly the average user pattern, we wanted to find out how these models would cope with such a stressful and accelerated aging process. And no, we didn't make one of our testers turn them on and off for five days — we programmed a computer to do it for us.

For three days, we switched all the models on for 15 seconds, then gave them 45 seconds' rest before switching them on again — 400 cycles per day, with the processing bowls holding 200 mL of water. When the processors didn't seem to be stressed at all after three days of this routine, we doubled the on-cycle to 30 seconds, followed by 45 seconds off, for the last two days. That proved too much for the **SUNBEAM Oskar II LC 026**. On the last day of our test it gave up with a bang, smoke and flames. The manufacturer told us that newer **SUNBEAM** models have improved bearings and inbuilt thermal fuses, which should help to prevent such problems occurring in the future.

All the other models came through the test unscathed, which was impressive in terms of their potential durability. However, other factors such as durability of plastic parts and blades also influence the lifespan of a food processor. That's why we didn't incorporate these results into the performance score.

MELTED PLASTIC AND WRONG INSTRUCTIONS

WE INITIALLY bought four **RONSON** models that fell into our selected price category for testing: the **8336, 8341, 8343** and **8346**. However, early in our testing we had some problems with two of these models.

Testing revealed that one of the speeds on the **8343** was too slow to chop or blend, although the instructions indicated these tasks should be done on that speed; we suspected it might have a fault. At the same time, when we tried to chop carrots with the **8336** — a food processor less than a week old — the plastic inside the blade shaft melted.

Ronson said it was aware of this problem and had now reinforced the plastic used on the blade shaft with fibreglass. A representative from Ronson also told our tester the two models were identical apart from the **8343** having a pushbutton rather than a dial control. With this information — and a very tight testing schedule to meet — we decided to transfer the chopping blade from the **8343** to the **8336** and only test the **8336**, leaving the problem of the **8343**'s faulty speed to be sorted out later. This blade gave us no further problems, but we can't say whether it was one of the new, reinforced ones, as they aren't marked — so there's no way for you to tell either.

Later still, Ronson informed us that the slower speed on the **8343** was not a fault but was designed to run the citrus press, and this model was not identical to the **8336** after all. By that time it was too late in our testing schedule to test the **8343**, so we can't report on its performance.

rate ol	5 Claimed maximum liquid capacity (mL)	Dishwasher-safe	Bowl microwave-safe	6 Ease of use score (%)	7 Performance score (%)	8 Overall score (%)	Brand/model (In rank order)
	500	✓	✓	74	70	72	**PHILIPS** HR2871
	1000			68	66	67	**BRAUN** Multipractic Plus Basic UK9
	500	✓	✓ *(F)*	76	57	67	**BREVILLE** Cyclonic Wizz Micro FP-8
	800			66	63	65	**KENWOOD** Gourmet FP101
	800, blender 1200			66	63	65	**RONSON** 8336 *(A)*
	800	✓		62	64	63	**MOULINEX** Masterchef 350 B 66 *(B)*
	500	✓		56	67	62	**BLACK & DECKER** Short Cut FP33
	250	✓		56	64	60	**RONSON** Gourmet Chef 8341
	800	✓		60	59	60	**MOULINEX** Masterchef 470 B 67 *(B)*
	Blender 1000 *(E)*			60	55	57	**SUNBEAM** Oskar II LC 026
	600, blender 1000			58	45	52	**RONSON** Multi Chef 8346

Comparable models
We tested the **MOULINEX Masterchef 470 B 67**, which has a citrus press and a juice extractor. It is technically similar to the **MOULINEX Masterchef 450 C 80**, which has no juice extractor, but a citrus press, an accessories storage box and a chipping blade. The **MOULINEX Masterchef 350 B 66**, with only one speed, is also technically similar, but we decided to test this model to find out whether variable speeds improved the overall performance. See also *Melted plastic and wrong instructions*, left, for information on other similar models.

1 Type
Continuous flow or batch processing? on page 31 provides more details on the pros and cons of these different methods of food processing. A blender attachment is particularly suitable for mixing and blending liquid and semi-liquid foods and may be used for cake mixing as well, if the processing bowl is too small.

2 Noise
The noise readings were taken at the operator's ear height with the processor running with 200 mL of water. When the motors are stressed with heavier loads, they tend to get a bit louder or more annoying. The **BLACK & DECKER Short Cut FP33** made a particularly annoying screeching sound during kneading and the **RONSON Multi Chef 8346** when blending milkshakes.

3 Number of speeds
More doesn't necessarily mean better. In our tests, most food processors managed all processing tasks adequately with one speed. In fact, in some cases the processors performed worse when we changed the speed according to instructions. However, certain tasks may require a slower speed. Most manufacturers told us a citrus press, for example, can't operate at a high speed. The two **MOULINEX** models, one with one and the other with four speeds, performed almost equally at some of the tasks for which use of the variable speed control was recommended.

4 Separate pulse control
A separate pulse control gives you short bursts of power without having to switch the processor on and off.

5 Capacity
We filled the processing bowls (and/or blender attachments, as appropriate) with the claimed maximum capacity of water. As noted in *The bigger the bowl* on page 31, we found discrepancies between what most were claimed to hold and what they in fact could hold.

6 Ease of use
We assessed how much effort and time it takes to assemble and clean the processors and how stable they are in operation. We also checked the on-off switches. Are they accessible and practical? Can they easily be switched on by accident? Last but not least we evaluated the instructions for content, clarity and usefulness.

7 Performance
This score is based on the processors doing the things you'll probably buy them for: grating cheese, potato, onion and carrots, chopping bread, raw chicken meat and carrot, mixing cake, mayonnaise and milkshakes, slicing raw vegetables, fruit and salami, and kneading dough. We tested the models only on general tasks for which they were recommended, and most of the time we followed the manufacturer's instructions for accessories and speeds. However, when we could achieve better results going against these recommendations, we did so.

8 Overall score
Performance and ease of use each make up 50% of the overall score.

COME IN, MUM AND DAD

It seems the nursery of the '90s is not complete unless the baby has its own intercom to stay in constant touch. We tested baby monitors for convenience, features and performance.

EXPERIENCED PARENTS MIGHT find it puzzling to be told babies need electronic assistance to get your attention. Yet if the number of baby monitors appearing on the market is anything to go by, increasing numbers of new parents are willing to part with anything from $40 to around $120 to provide their tiny offspring with just that.

Baby monitors are a comparatively recent addition to the long shopping lists of new and prospective parents. Five years ago there was only one brand on the market in Australia. In that short time, however, five new brands have lodged themselves firmly on those shopping lists, right up there with cuddly toys and a good supply of nappies. They are now competing strongly for slices of a rapidly growing market.

PROFILES
Profiles of the best performers are listed in rank order. Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994. Anything lower is a bargain.

FOR YOUR CONVENIENCE

Most baby monitors in this test are simple one-way intercom systems. They have a transmitter which is placed near the baby and a receiver positioned near you, allowing you to keep tabs on your infant when you're not in immediate proximity. Of the 11 models in our test, eight work by FM radio signals, making the receivers portable. Three others operate by mains transmission: both transmitter and receiver are plugged into power points and the signal is passed from room to room via the household wiring.

These devices will let you hear a baby crying if it's distressed or, depending on the sensitivity of the transmitter, perhaps even cooing contentedly if it's merely awake. With portable models, the receiver unit can be carried with you — perhaps instead of carrying the sleeping baby itself — up to the effective range. You might go out to the backyard clothesline, for instance, with the receiver clipped to your belt, or entertain friends round the barbecue without needing to run inside every 10 minutes to see if the baby has woken. It's not hard to imagine a variety of situations where this kind of usage could be very convenient.

PORTABLE RECEIVERS

REALISTIC FM Cordless Room Monitor 43-202A
Target price: $80
Good points
- Best overall.
- Very good reception in all situations tested, from easy to difficult.
- Has a single nine volt battery which is very easy to change.

Bad points
- No power light on transmitter.
- Belt clip on receiver is almost impossible to use.

BABYCOM Two-Way Nursery Monitor 6200
Target price: $100
Good points
- Very good performance.
- Two-way operation gives flexibility and allows it to be used as an intercom.
- Both transceiver units are battery-powered so are easily moved around, but ....

Bad points
- ...Portability is somewhat limited by relatively large size and weight.
- Access to battery compartment requires a tool.

BABYCOM Mobile Baby Monitor 5730-AD
Target price: $80
Good points
- Well designed belt clip.
- Visual LED display.
- Hinged aerial makes it easy to optimise reception whether bench or wall-mounted.

Bad points
- Layout of batteries makes them difficult to change and getting to them requires a tool.

However, these devices in no way substitute for parental supervision. They let you hear sounds — always assuming power supplies are uninterrupted and batteries aren't flat — and in some cases only relatively loud sounds at that. They are not safety devices or medical monitors (see *Not for medical use* below).

Packed with features

A possible measure of the competition for market share is the sheer number of features manufacturers are now packing into some of these monitors (the table overleaf shows which models had the features we considered most useful).

■ Basics like **volume control** come on nearly all models. Only two monitors in our test, the **SHIMASU F1310** and **F1201**, didn't feature it. This was a particularly bad point with the mains transmission **F1201** model, whose volume was fixed at an annoyingly loud level.

■ One feature that might appeal, depending on how the monitors are used, is a **VOX circuit**. This is a sound-activated switching device that activates the monitor only when a certain level of noise is picked up by the transmitter. If you intend to leave the monitor on by your bedside all night, this means you should hear loud noises like your baby crying, without having to listen to a buzz of background static when all's quiet.

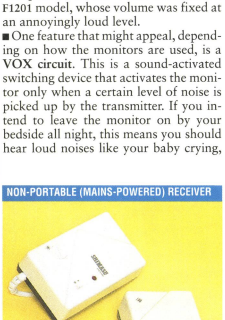
■ Two of the mains transmission models also have a **variable sensitivity control** so you can set the sound threshold that activates them.

■ A **visual display** is another feature to look for. These consist of light-emitting diode (LED) indicators that light up when sound is being transmitted to alert you to your child's cries even if you're using your blender and power saw at the time. Two portable models, the **BABY-COM 5730-AD** and the **GERRY 604**, have a series of LEDs which light up according to the sound level, with red ones indicating top-of-the-range crying. Two of the non-portable models have a single light on the receiver to show when the VOX circuit is operating, though the **SHIMASU F1201** only has a light on the transmitter.

■ The **GERRY 604** is the only one to combine an LED indicator with a **mute switch**. This enables you to place the unit, say, on top of the TV, switch off the sound so as not to spoil your favourite show, yet still get the message when your baby wakes up (turning the volume right down on other models with visual displays achieves the same result). This model also comes with two other unique features: an indicator flashes when the receiver goes out of the transmitter's range, and the unit emits a beep and flashes its power lamp to indicate the batteries are getting low on charge. The first is not really necessary since it's easy to tell when any of the receivers are moving out of range by the increase in static noise and drop-off in signal quality. The second is a good feature, since flat batteries will leave you out of touch with the baby while thinking you're in contact. We strongly recommend checking all portable models every time you use them to ensure the batteries are fresh. Despite being loaded with features, the **GERRY 604** was a poor performer in our tests.

■ All transmitter units on the portable models either plug directly into mains power or come with AC adaptors, but

NON-PORTABLE (MAINS-POWERED) RECEIVER



SHIMASU FM Baby/Room Monitor F1401

Target price: $50

Good points

■ Sound-activated so you don't have to listen to static.

■ Very good performance both on strong sound and soft sound loud enough to trigger VOX circuit, which also has adjustable sensitivity control.

■ Night light.

Bad points

■ Emits a noise pulse at the end of each transmission, which some may find annoying.

NOT FOR MEDICAL USE

THE GROWTH of the market for baby monitors in recent years has coincided with increased public awareness of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) — or 'cot death' — since the advent of the annual 'Red Nose Day' fund raisers in 1988. This suggests the worrying possibility that people's decisions to buy them are motivated by natural parental anxiety over SIDS. It is vital to realise these products are most definitely not useful or intended as medical monitors or safety products. They give no idea of movement or breathing patterns so, while they can let you know if your baby's crying, they tell you nothing of what it's doing silently or *not* doing.

Of the monitors we looked at, only the **GERRY** brand carried what we regard as a sufficiently clear and explicit warning in its in instructions that it is "Not designed or intended for use as a medical monitor". In the interests of helping consumers make a fully informed choice when deciding whether to buy these products, we would like to see all of them display a clear, prominent warning on the packaging.

The instructions for the **SHIMASU** products, by contrast, actually refer to them as "Baby Sitters" — an irresponsible, if not dangerous, claim that might be taken to imply the devices can somehow substitute for supervision by a carer who is physically present. A baby monitor is no more a babysitter than your telephone.

Real medical monitors which sound an alarm in the event of abnormal breathing or other physiological patterns are made available to parents of infants in high-risk categories through the Sudden Infant Death Association (SIDA) and some public hospitals. A spokeswoman for SIDA, Elizabeth Bishop, told us that while different incidences of 'cot death' might have a variety of causes, the research so far shows four main factors believed to help prevent SIDS:

■ Sleep babies on their sides or backs.

■ Don't overheat them with excessive bedclothes.

■ Keep their environment smoke-free.

■ Preferably breastfeed them, if possible.

She said there was no evidence whatsoever to suggest that a 'SIDS event' was audible: there's rarely any sign of distress or struggle. An intercom-type baby monitor like those in our test, therefore, is entirely inappropriate as a 'cot death' counter-measure.

The very good news is that since the launch of the first 'Red Nose Day' in 1988, with the massive lift in public awareness the annual campaign has brought, the rate of SIDS incidence has virtually halved from about two per thousand live births to around one per thousand now.

Baby monitors

Brand and model (in rank order within groups)	Manufacturer/distributor	Origin	Target price* ($)	Warranty (years)	1 VOX circuit	2 Sensitivity control	3 Visual display
PORTABLE							
REALISTIC FM Cordless Room Monitor 43-202A	Intertan	Thailand	80	90 days			
BABYCOM Two-Way Nursery Monitor 6200	Southern Model Supplies	China	100	1			
BABYCOM Mobile Baby Monitor 5730-AD	Southern Model Supplies	China	80	1			✓(B)
GERRY Premier Nursery Monitor 603	Roger Armstrong	China	80	1			
LINDAM Baby Talk Cordless	Bilbo Trading	China	90	2			
SHIMASU Cordless Monitor Intercom Set F1310	Dick Smith Electronics	China	60	1	✓		
NOT RECOMMENDED							
GERRY Look 'n' Listen Baby Monitor 604 (A)	Roger Armstrong	China	105	1		✓	✓(B)
LINDAM Baby Talk Deluxe (A)	Bilbo Trading	China	115	2			
NON-PORTABLE (mains power)							
SHIMASU FM Baby/Room Monitor F1401	Dick Smith Electronics	China	50	1	✓	✓	✓(C)
NOT RECOMMENDED							
SHIMASU FM Baby/Room Monitor F1201	Dick Smith Electronics	China	40	1	✓		
REALISTIC FM Baby Room Monitor 43-9319	Intertan	China	50	90 days	✓	✓	✓(C)

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994.

(A) Model was to be superseded from October 1994, though some stock may still be available in shops.

(B) LEDs on receiver show sound level.
(C) Light on receiver shows VOX operation only.

the **BABYCOM 6200**, the **LINDAM Baby Talk Cordless** and the **GERRY 604** offer the option of batteries as well. All the portable receivers run on batteries, but can also be run from an AC adaptor if you're using them indoors. Only the **SHIMASU F1310** came without an adaptor.

■ Other extras include keyhole slots for **wall mounting** and belt clips for the receivers on most portables. The **LINDAM Baby Talk Deluxe** and the **SHIMASU F1310** receiver units are small enough to fit into most pockets. The **GERRY 604's** belt clip doubles as a stand, letting you prop it up on a table or workbench.

■ The **LINDAM Baby Talk Deluxe** also features a **night light** on the transmitter unit which can be turned on or off and set to switch off by a timer. The **SHIMASU F1401** and **REALISTIC 43-9319** models both have a rather dim, red neon night light that stays on while they're connected to the power.

■ Only one model in our test — the **BABYCOM 6200** — functions **two-way**, enabling you to hear sound coming from the baby's room and communicate back to someone in the room — though we don't suggest trying to comfort a crying baby by remote communication. It has two identical transceivers instead of a distinct transmitter and receiver. Each has a large button that is pressed to speak. To use it as a straight monitor you simply lock down the button on the unit near the baby. A 'receive' LED on the other unit indicates the transmitter is on.

The two-way facility means this product is a little more flexible than the others and can be put to use as an ordinary household intercom once its baby monitoring days are over.

Loud and clear?

We tested all the monitors in various household transmission situations, ranging from straightforward, room-to-room usage to a fairly difficult assignment: from a third-floor flat to a backyard clothesline. Our test took account of their performance in transmitting both speech and a ticking clock, to see if they could keep you in touch with your baby during its quieter moments too.

Most of the monitors had acceptable reception quality in the basic indoor application, though the **SHIMASU F1201** had fairly loud and distorted sound even there. The performance of all models tended to deteriorate as more distance and obstructions like walls intervened between transmitter and receiver. Deteriorating performance is marked by an increase in noise and a decrease in the clarity of the sound.

The **GERRY 604** was noisy over even short distances, while the **LINDAM Baby Talk Deluxe** was also poor indoors and so noisy in the difficult going that low-level sounds were completely inaudible. We tested this model on battery-powered reception only, owing to a fault which prevented mains-powered operation, but there seems no reason why it should perform significantly better with mains power than fresh batteries. We tried to have it repaired but were told by the manufacturer that this wasn't possible since the model was to be superseded by a new one from October 1994.

The **REALISTIC 43-9319** scored badly because it was too insensitive to pick up low-level sounds even with its sensitivity control on maximum.

Interference is a commonly experienced problem with these products. The portable ones can pick up external radio signals such as nearby citizens' band (CB) transmissions and signals from cordless phones. Mains transmission is not always a solution to this problem. Depending on the phase of the power supply to different houses in the street (or flats in the block) mains units can sometimes pick up the cries of your neighbours' baby — or the conversations of its parents — if they have a similar product.

They are also vulnerable to noise from electric motors and other electrical interference. To combat these problems, all the monitors but the **REALISTIC 43-9319** offer a choice of two channels so you can switch if you encounter interference on one. We recommend you don't buy a one-channel model unless you live in a very quiet area, remote from neighbours.

We also tested the monitors for interference by operating them on the same power circuit as an electric drill. Only the **SHIMASU F1201** was badly affected by interference, though that's not to say others might not be in different circumstances.

way use	Wall mounting	4 Performance score (%)	5 Ease of use score (%)	6 Overall score (%)	Brand and model (in rank order within groups)
					PORTABLE
	✓ *(D)*	87	60	79	**REALISTIC** FM Cordless Room Monitor 43-202A
	✓	83	50	73	**BABYCOM** Two-Way Nursery Monitor 6200
	✓	76	60	71	**BABYCOM** Mobile Baby Monitor 5730-AD
	✓	62	70	64	**GERRY** Premier Nursery Monitor 603
	✓	66	55	63	**LINDAM** Baby Talk Cordless
	✓ *(E)*	54	80	62	**SHIMASU** Cordless Monitor Intercom Set F1310
					NOT RECOMMENDED
	✓	32	75	45	**GERRY** Look 'n' Listen Baby Monitor 604 *(A)*
	✓ *(F)*	26	65	38	**LINDAM** Baby Talk Deluxe *(A)*
					NON-PORTABLE (mains power)
	✓	93	not applicable	93	**SHIMASU** FM Baby/Room Monitor F1401
					NOT RECOMMENDED
		50	not applicable	50	**SHIMASU** FM Baby/Room Monitor F1201
	✓	30	not applicable	30	**REALISTIC** FM Baby Room Monitor 43-9319

(D) Keyhole slot for wall mounting on receiver only.
(E) Transmitter wall mountable; receiver has fridge magnet.
(F) Transmitter only.

WHAT TO BUY

Three portable models stood out in our test. If you want a mobile baby monitor that can be used outdoors or out of reach of power points, choose one from this list. If you only need a monitor for indoor use where there are plenty of convenient sockets, a non-portable type will fit the bill and save you ever having to worry about batteries. One non-portable model was far superior to the other two tested.

PORTABLE

REALISTIC
FM Cordless Room Monitor 43-202A $80

BABYCOM
Two-Way Nursery Monitor 6200 $100

BABYCOM
Mobile Baby Monitor 5730-AD $80

NON-PORTABLE

SHIMASU
FM Baby/Room Monitor F1401 $50

Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in August 1994.

FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

WE HAD the monitors in our test assessed by an occupational therapist from the Independent Living Centre. The visual LED displays on the **GERRY 604** and the **BABYCOM 5730-AD** (which is in our *What to buy* list) are useful for people with hearing impairment, though changing batteries with the **BABYCOM** is complicated for people with manual dexterity problems. The **GERRY**'s controls are also slightly easier to use.

Changing batteries could be a problem with most of the monitors, especially those requiring four AA cells. A single nine volt battery is easiest to manage — it could even be changed with one hand. Unfortunately, the two models that have one, the **GERRY 603** and the **REALISTIC 43-202A**, also come with small, recessed switches requiring fine finger control. The **BABYCOM 6200** has the biggest, easiest to use controls, but battery changing is a headache requiring not just two hands but a tool as well. The **REALISTIC** and the **BABYCOM** are in our *What to buy* list for good performance.

For those with disabilities who prefer a voice-activated monitor, the portable **SHIMASU F1310** is a good choice.

1 VOX circuit
Causes monitor to transmit only when a certain level of sound is picked up. Preferably should be combined with a sensitivity control (see *Packed with features*, page 37).

2 Sensitivity control
Allows you to vary the minimum level of sound that will be picked up and transmitted.

3 Visual display
Sequential LEDs show volume level on portable receivers; a single light on non-portable receivers shows unit is transmitting (see *Packed with features*).

4 Performance score
This is an average of scores for three different, increasingly difficult test situations, and, for portables, the longer the distance was (without intervening walls, etc) over which they kept on working. The scoring took account of clarity of the sound, amount of background noise and sensitivity to low sounds.

5 Ease of use score
Only the portables were assessed: for how easy the receivers are to use while on the move and how easy it is to change batteries.

6 Overall score
For portables we awarded scores for performance (70% of overall score) and ease of use (30%). For non-portables, only transmitting performance was rated.

MORE WASHING MACHINES

In September we published the results of our washing machine tests based on a cold water wash. In this update we complete the picture, with results for larger machines and those models which weren't available in time for the September article.

THIS REPORT COMPLETES A LOOK at the under $1200 portion of the market, with a further 10 models tested since our *Coming clean* article in September, and a multitude of clone models reported on. The table on pages 42-45 gives the combined results for both tests. For a full report on the way we tested the machines see the September article.

Since we first tested washing machines back in 1963, the technology has changed considerably, but that's not all that's changed. Many people these days choose to wash their clothes in cold water rather than hot: a move which benefits the consumer by saving money and helps the environment by lowering energy consumption. Our testing needs to reflect the way you use the machines, so in this new test we've compared models based on a cold wash rather than the warm wash previously used.

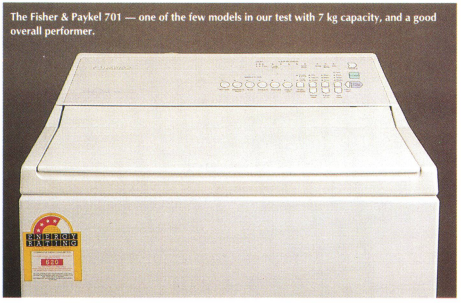
The biggest effect of switching to cold water is greater energy efficiency. A major portion of the energy used in a hot or warm wash goes into heating the water, either in the machine or your hot water system. Washing in cold water means much less energy is used, and this translates to dollars saved on your electricity bill as well as the environmental benefit of cutting power consumption. It's not all good news, though. A cold water wash doesn't get out quite as much dirt, but the differences aren't always noticeable, particularly on darker colours, so many people are just as satisfied with the results.

RUNNING COSTS

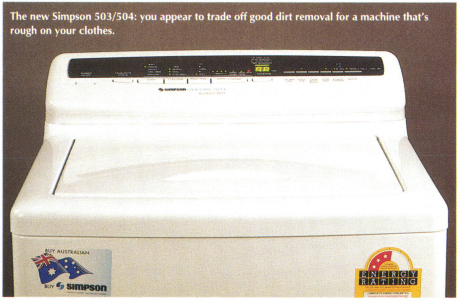
Washing machines are expensive items to buy, but they can also be an ongoing drain on your wallet. The cost of running the machines can mount to a considerable sum over time. We assessed the running costs of these machines and found it ranged from $60 per year for the **GORENJE PS99** to $130 a year for the **GE WWA 6604**.

This assessment was based on a number of assumptions — that you wash 1000 kg of clothes a year using a full load each time, electricity costs 10 c/kWh, water costs 65 c/kL and detergent costs $3.50/kg. The detergent cost ended up being around 75% of the total running costs. So, if you use a dearer detergent, it will have a significant effect on the cost.

Looking at a combination of purchase price and running cost, the **GORENJE PS99** and **GORENJE PS400 GX** were the cheapest over the long term. However, we're reluctant to recommend them as value-for-money machines because a high proportion of **GORENJEs** owned by our reliability survey respondents needed repair in the last 12 months, and this will significantly increase their overall running costs (see *How reliable are they?*, right).



The Fisher & Paykel 701 — one of the few models in our test with 7 kg capacity, and a good overall performer.



The new Simpson 503/504: you appear to trade off good dirt removal for a machine that's rough on your clothes.

WHAT TO BUY

The washing performance in cold water in front and top loaders is much the same, but front loaders tend to do better in some of our other performance criteria (water efficiency and gentleness), while many people find top loaders more convenient (they're generally quicker and you can add clothes to the wash mid-cycle).

FRONT LOADERS

The **GORENJE PS 1035 GX** had, by a very narrow margin, the highest overall score, but because of the brand's comparatively poor reliability (see *How reliable are they?)* we haven't included this model in our *What to buy* list.

The **WHIRLPOOL AWG384** was the next best performer of the front loaders tested. However, there's very little difference between most of the front loaders for washing performance and this **WHIRLPOOL** is expensive to buy and run. A better buy is the **HOOVER 550** or its **ADMIRAL 700** clone, which scored almost as well overall.

	WHIRLPOOL AWG384 (4.5 kg)	$1080
	ADMIRAL 700 (4 kg)	$960
qual	**HOOVER** 550 (4 kg)	$960
	HOOVER 555 (4 kg)	$1020
qual	**IGNIS** AWL305 (4.5 kg)	$900
	OMEGA 505-2 (4.5 kg)	$990
	WHIRLPOOL AWG354 (4.5 kg)	$950

TOP LOADERS

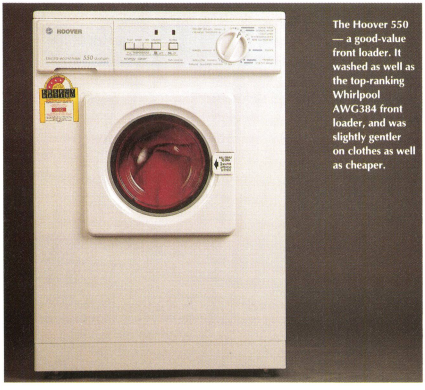
The **HITACHI PAF-1260PX, FISHER & PAYKEL 701** and **FISHER & PAYKEL 601** were equal top of the top loaders overall. The **HITACHI** was slightly better at getting dirt out and used less water but the **FISHER & PAYKELs** have a larger load capacity so may be a better choice for larger families. All three take bigger loads than any of the recommended front loaders.

The **ADMIRAL 510** is significantly cheaper — the cheapest in our test with 5 kg capacity — and gave equal second-best washing results of all the machines. If you don't mind the high water consumption and low spin efficiency it's a good budget buy. Check out the prices of its twins in the Hoover and Admiral range as well (see table) since they're technically similar and may have extra features that appeal to you.

The **SIMPSON 503** and its twin the **504** cleaned up the field when it came to dirt removal. While these models will get your clothes very clean, they were by far the roughest machines in our test. Over time this could affect your clothes and cause undue wear, so we haven't included these models in the *What to buy* list.

	FISHER & PAYKEL 601 (6 kg)	$1000
equal	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 701 (7 kg)	$1100
	HITACHI PAF-1260PX (5.5 kg)	$940
	FISHER & PAYKEL 501/051 (5 kg)	$900/$810
	ADMIRAL 510 (5 kg)	$590
	HITACHI PAF-1220P (5.5 kg)	$870

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in June and August 1994.



The Hoover 550 — a good-value front loader. It washed as well as the top-ranking Whirlpool AWG384 front loader, and was slightly gentler on clothes as well as cheaper.

HOW RELIABLE ARE THEY?

We asked in our survey on the reliability of appliances if respondents' washing machines had needed repair in the last 12 months. The results are given below for the most popular brands. The number in brackets is the number of machines of the particular brand in the survey. Just over 20% of all machines needed some sort of repair in the past 12 months, at an average cost of $85.

Machines under six or seven years old were generally more reliable the younger they were. Brands such as **FISHER & PAYKEL** and **KLEENMAID**, which had a fairly low average age in our survey, may have benefited from this age factor, but they were still better than the average for their respective ages. The **HITACHIs**, which had quite a high average age, were also noticeably better than average. **GORENJE**, whose machines had a low average age, has no excuse for its poor performance.

Because this survey covered all machines people own (new and old), it includes some brands we haven't tested and doesn't include some we have.

Brand (sample size)	% not needing repair
Kleenmaid (105)	93
Fisher & Paykel (135)	90
Hitachi (351)	86
General Electric (170)	82
Simpson (1041)	78
Whirlpool (147)	77
Hoover (1355)	74
Westinghouse (109)	73
Malleys (113)	71
Gorenje (89)	64

We also asked our panellists if they'd buy the same brand of washing machine again and got the following responses.

Brand	% who would buy again
Fisher & Paykel	98
Whirlpool	95
Hitachi	93
Westinghouse	93
Malleys	86
General Electric	85
Hoover	84
Kleenmaid	84
Simpson	84
Gorenje	74

Washing machines

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price ($)*	Warranty (years)	Dimensions HxWxD (mm)	Cycle time (minutes)	1 Wash load (kg)	2 Tap connection	2 Heater	3 Running cost ($/yr)*
	GORENJE PS 1035 GX **(F)**	Gorenje Pacific	Slovenia	1090	1 *(B)*	850 x 595 x 610	53	4	C/H&C	✓	90
	FISHER & PAYKEL 601 **(T)**	Fisher & Paykel	NZ	1000	1 *(C)*	995 x 595 x 615	42	6	C/H&C		85
equal	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 701 **(T)**	Fisher & Paykel	NZ	1100	1 *(C)*	1005 x 650 x 660	43	7	C/H&C		90
	HITACHI PAF-1260PX **(T)**	Hitachi	Japan	940	3	1020 x 605 x 610	36	5.5	C/H&C		80
	WHIRLPOOL AWG 384 **(F)**	Whirlpool	Italy	1080	2 *(D)*	845 x 595 x 525	53	4.5	C/H&C	✓	90
	FISHER & PAYKEL 051 **(T)**	Fisher & Paykel	NZ	810	1 *(C)*	985 x 555 x 575	35	5	C/H&C		85
	FISHER & PAYKEL 501 **(T)**	Fisher & Paykel	NZ	900	1 *(C)*	985 x 555 x 575	35	5	C/H&C		85
equal	**ADMIRAL** 700 **(F)**	Hoover	Australia	960	2	857 x 585 x 570	46	4	C/H&C		100
	HOOVER 550 **(F)**	Hoover	Australia	960	2	857 x 585 x 570	46	4	C/H&C		100
	HOOVER 555 **(F)**	Hoover	Australia	1020	2	857 x 585 x 570	46	4	C/H&C		100
	HITACHI PAF-1220P **(T)**	Hitachi	Japan	870	3	1030 x 605 x 610	36	5.5	C/H&C		80
	ADMIRAL 510 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	590	2	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	ADMIRAL 5100 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 770 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 800 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	870	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 900 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	830	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER 972 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	950	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
equal	**HOOVER** 1000 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	970	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Commodore 792 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	680	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Commodore 892 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Galaxy 784 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	740	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Galaxy 884 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	790	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Gemini 894 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	HOOVER Premier 750 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	750	2 *(E)*	1020 x 595 x 590	50	5	C/H&C		90
	SIMPSON 503 **(T)**	Email	Australia	900	3 *(G)*	1030 x 600 x 640	51	5	C/H&C		85
	SIMPSON 504 **(T)**	Email	Australia	1000	3 *(G)*	1030 x 600 x 640	51	5	C/H&C		85
	GORENJE PS 400 GX **(F)**	Gorenje Pacific	Slovenia	820	1 *(B)*	855 x 595 x 600	46	4.5	C/H&C		65
	IGNIS AWL305 **(F)** *(A)*	Whirlpool	Italy	900	1 *(H)*	845 x 600 x 515	89	4.5	C	✓	65
	OMEGA 505-2 **(F)** *(A)*	Omega	Italy	990	2	850 x 595 x 530	90	4.5	C/H&C	✓	70
	SIMPSON Aquarius 826 **(T)**	Email	Australia	880	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95
	SIMPSON Aquarius 828 **(T)**	Email	Australia	1040	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95
equal	**SIMPSON** Aquarius 829 **(T)**	Email	Australia	1060	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95
	SIMPSON Deluxe 823 **(T)**	Email	Australia	960	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95
	SIMPSON Deluxe 721 **(T)**	Email	Australia	870	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95
	SIMPSON Concorde 821 **(T)**	Email	Australia	950	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95
	SIMPSON Riviera 730 **(T)**	Email	Australia	850	2 *(E)*	1090 x 660 x 730	55	6.5	C/H&C		95

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in June and August 1994.

(F) Front loader
(T) Top loader

(A) Discontinued but may be available in some stores.
(B) Two-year warranty on parts for the main motor.
(C) Additional one-year warranty available if you complete and return the *Smart Care* card.
(D) 10 years on outer tub.
(E) Five-year parts warranty on various components.
(G) Up to 10 years on some parts.
(H) Five years on outer tub.
(J) Up to 20 years on some parts.
(K) Two years on sealed transmission and main motor.
(L) Five-year parts warranty for rust and 10-year parts warranty for gearbox assembly.

Clones

Some machines are identical in performance though sold or badged under a variety of names and with different features. These groups of 'clones' are indicated in the brand-name column by a square bracket to the right of the names. While their performance should be identical, different features and wash programs account for differences in price.

1 Wash load

This is the load stated on the energy rating label and the load we tested at. Generally this is a bit more than you would normally put into the machine. Particularly for front loaders it becomes a bit of a struggle to squeeze the last few items in.

2 Tap connection/heater

The machine marked 'C' in the table has just the one inlet for connection to the cold tap. Machines marked 'C/H&C' have two inlets, though you only have to have one connected. If you want a warm wash and don't have a hot tap in your laundry, choose a model with a heater. Unfortunately for people in this situation who prefer a top loader, there isn't one with a heater, something we'd like to see manufacturers remedy.

3 Running costs

This is an estimate of the cost of washing 1000 kg of clothes during a year. See *Running costs* in the main article for more information.

4 Water efficiency score (%)	5 Energy efficiency score (%)	6 Gentleness score (%)	7 Spin efficiency score (%)	8 Dirt removal score (%)	9 Overall score (%)	Brand/model (in rank order)
56	97	76	69	73	74	**GORENJE** PS 1035 GX **(F)**
47	98	66	73	75	73	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 601 **(T)**
43	98	72	75	73	73	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 701 **(T)**
53	98	72	58	77	73	**HITACHI** PAF-1260PX **(T)**
54	96	78	61	74	73	**WHIRLPOOL** AWG 384 **(F)**
46	98	70	65	74	72	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 051 **(T)**
46	98	70	65	74	72	**FISHER & PAYKEL** 501 **(T)**
50	93	82	60	73	72	**ADMIRAL** 700 **(F)**
50	93	82	60	73	72	**HOOVER** 550 **(F)**
50	93	82	60	73	72	**HOOVER** 555 **(F)**
56	98	70	52	72	70	**HITACHI** PAF-1220P **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**ADMIRAL** 510 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**ADMIRAL** 5100 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 770 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 800 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 900 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 972 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** 1000 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Commodore 792 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Commodore 892 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Galaxy 784 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Galaxy 884 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Gemini 894 **(T)**
44	96	70	47	78	70	**HOOVER** Premier 750 **(T)**
50	96	54	48	82	70	**SIMPSON** 503 **(T)**
50	96	54	48	82	70	**SIMPSON** 504 **(T)**
71	97	82	33	67	69	**GORENJE** PS 400 GX **(F)**
62	94	80	32	71	69	**IGNIS** AWL305 **(F)** *(A)*
50	94	82	33	74	69	**OMEGA** 505-2 **(F)** *(A)*
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Aquarius 826 **(T)**
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Aquarius 828 **(T)**
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Aquarius 829 **(T)**
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Deluxe 823 **(T)**
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Deluxe 721 **(T)**
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Concorde 821 **(T)**
46	97	64	43	78	69	**SIMPSON** Riviera 730 **(T)**

4 Water used/water efficiency
The first column gives the total amount of water used during the 'normal' cycle wash. To assess the water efficiency we looked at the amount of water used per kilogram of clothes washed. We then converted this to a rating where a lower water consumption per kilogram gets a higher score. You may be unconcerned about water consumption at the moment but Australia has limited water resources. If you buy a washing machine now you're likely to have it for the next 10 years or more and water prices will probably rise significantly in most places during that time.

5 Energy efficiency
We measured energy efficiency on the basis of kilowatt hours (kWh) of electricity used for each kilogram of a load of washing. The scores are all high because we used cold water.

6 Gentleness
Swatches of easily frayed embroidery material were attached to garments in each wash load. The area of the swatch was measured before and after the wash. The less fraying that occurred, the more gentle the machine and the higher the score.

7 Spin efficiency
This was calculated by weighing the clothes after the whole wash cycle was completed to determine how much water was still in them.

8 Dirt removal
Dirt removal was assessed using specially soiled white swatches. The brightness of the swatch (measured by the amount of light reflected) indicates how clean it is. These figures are lower than in previous years, undoubtedly the result of switching to a cold wash.

9 Overall score
Dirt removal makes up 40% of the overall score since this is the primary purpose of a washing machine. The other four performance factors — water efficiency, energy efficiency, gentleness and spin efficiency — were each weighted equally at 15% of the overall score.

Washing machines

	Brand/model (in rank order)	Manufacturer/ distributor	Origin	Target price ($)*	Warranty (years)	Dimensions HxWxD (mm)	Cycle time (minutes)	1 Wash load (kg)	2 Tap connection	2 Heater	3 Ru cos ($/
	HITACHI SAF-1020PX **(T)**	Hitachi	Japan	840	3	1000 x 570 x 570	34	4.5	C/H&C		7
	ADMIRAL 6005 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	ADMIRAL 6100 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	920	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	ADMIRAL Madison **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	1000	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER 1300 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	960	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER 1400 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	1000	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER 1420 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	1100	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER 1500 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	1100	2 *(J)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Commander 1240A **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	890	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Commander 1340 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	940	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Elite 1205 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	780	2	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
equal	**HOOVER** Elite 1210 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	850	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Elite 1220 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	970	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Elite 1225 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	1210	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Galaxy 1260 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	920	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Galaxy 1360 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	980	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Gemini 1290 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	880	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	HOOVER Gemini 1390 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	950	2 *(E)*	1085 x 660 x 700	46	6	C/H&C		9
	SIMPSON Aquarius 824 **(T)**	Email	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1090 x 670 x 710	51	6	C/H&C		10
	SIMPSON Contessa 822 **(T)**	Email	Australia	830	2 *(E)*	1090 x 670 x 710	51	6	C/H&C		10
	SIMPSON Riviera 728 **(T)**	Email	Australia	800	2 *(E)*	1090 x 670 x 710	51	6	C/H&C		10
	WESTINGHOUSE 800 **(T)**	Email	Australia	970	2 *(E)*	1110 x 670 x 710	60	7	C/H&C		9
	WESTINGHOUSE 850 **(T)**	Email	Australia	1080	2 *(E)*	1110 x 670 x 710	60	7	C/H&C		9
	WHIRLPOOL AWG 354 **(F)**	Whirlpool	Italy	950	2 *(C)*	850 x 595 x 525	55	4.5	C/H&C	✓	8
	SIMPSON Concorde 527 **(T)**	Email	Australia	690	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
	SIMPSON Deluxe 421 **(T)**	Email	Australia	700	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
	SIMPSON Deluxe 526 **(T)**	Email	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
	SIMPSON Genesis 525 **(T)**	Email	Australia	680	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
	SIMPSON Genesis 528 **(T)**	Email	Australia	780	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
equal	**SIMPSON** Riviera 429 **(T)**	Email	Australia	660	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
	WESTINGHOUSE 555 **(T)**	Email	Australia	720	2 *(E)*	1030 x 575 x 620	40	5	C/H&C		8
	SIMPSON Contessa 425 **(T)**	Email	Australia	630	2 *(E)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		10
	SIMPSON Delta 422 **(T)**	Email	Australia	620	2 *(E)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		10
	SIMPSON Genesis 524 **(T)**	Email	Australia	730	2 *(E)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		10
	SIMPSON Riviera 428 **(T)**	Email	Australia	600	2 *(E)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		10
	WESTINGHOUSE 425 **(T)**	Email	Australia	620	2 *(E)*	995 x 575 x 620	43	4	C/H&C		10
	GORENJE PS 99 **(F)**	Gorenje Pacific	Slovenia	780	1 *(B)*	855 x 595 x 600	45	4.5	C/H&C		6
equal	**HOOVER** 710 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	680	2 *(E)*	990 x 600 x 600	39	4	C/H&C		11
	HOOVER Premier 705 **(T)**	Hoover	Australia	610	2 *(E)*	990 x 600 x 600	39	4	C/H&C		11
	AMERICANA AW9830 **(T)**	MEA	Canada	970	1 *(K)*	1090 x 680 x 650	42	5	C/H&C		12
equal	**AMERICANA** AW9850 **(T)**	MEA	Canada	980	1 *(K)*	1080 x 685 x 665	42	5	C/H&C		12
	GE WWA 6604 **(T)**	MEA	Canada	1140	2 *(L)*	1090 x 685 x 640	41	5	C/H&C		13

* Prices shown are a good target to aim for when shopping around, based on nationwide checks in June and August 1994.

(F) Front loader
(T) Top loader

(A) Discontinued but may be available in some stores.
(B) Two-year warranty on parts for the main motor.
(C) Additional one-year warranty available if you complete and return the *Smart Care* card.
(D) 10 years on outer tub.
(E) Five-year parts warranty on various components.
(G) Up to 10 years on some parts.
(H) Five years on outer tub.
(J) Up to 20 years on some parts.
(K) Two years on sealed transmission and main motor.
(L) Five-year parts warranty for rust and 10-year parts warranty for gearbox assembly.

4	5	6	7	8	9	
Water efficiency score (%)	**Energy efficiency score** (%)	**Gentleness score** (%)	**Spin efficiency score** (%)	**Dirt removal score** (%)	**Overall score** (%)	**Brand/model** (in rank order)
45	97	64	58	70	68	**HITACHI** SAF-1020PX **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**ADMIRAL** 6005 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**ADMIRAL** 6100 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**ADMIRAL** Madison **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** 1300 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** 1400 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** 1420 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** 1500 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Commander 1240A **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Commander 1340 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Elite 1205 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Elite 1210 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Elite 1220 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Elite 1225 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Galaxy 1260 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Galaxy 1360 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Gemini 1290 **(T)**
46	97	68	42	75	68	**HOOVER** Gemini 1390 **(T)**
48	96	64	52	73	68	**SIMPSON** Aquarius 824 **(T)**
48	96	64	52	73	68	**SIMPSON** Contessa 822 **(T)**
48	96	64	52	73	68	**SIMPSON** Riviera 728 **(T)**
49	97	62	54	71	68	**WESTINGHOUSE** 800 **(T)**
49	97	62	54	71	68	**WESTINGHOUSE** 850 **(T)**
64	95	80	28	70	68	**WHIRLPOOL** AWG 354 **(F)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Concorde 527 **(T)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Deluxe 421 **(T)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Deluxe 526 **(T)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Genesis 525 **(T)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Genesis 528 **(T)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**SIMPSON** Riviera 429 **(T)**
51	97	62	43	73	67	**WESTINGHOUSE** 555 **(T)**
40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Contessa 425 **(T)**
40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Delta 422 **(T)**
40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Genesis 524 **(T)**
40	96	60	49	77	67	**SIMPSON** Riviera 428 **(T)**
40	96	60	49	77	67	**WESTINGHOUSE** 425 **(T)**
70	97	76	33	62	66	**GORENJE** PS 99 **(F)**
34	96	64	40	78	66	**HOOVER** 710 **(T)**
34	96	64	40	78	66	**HOOVER** Premier 705 **(T)**
27	94	68	41	75	65	**AMERICANA** AW9830 **(T)**
31	95	64	44	74	65	**AMERICANA** AW9850 **(T)**
26	95	74	41	75	65	**GE** WWA 6604 **(T)**

WHAT DO YOU KNOW?

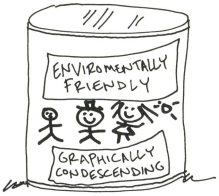
1 Due to international agreement, Australian wines will be losing many of their familiar names. Which ones? (More than one answer is correct.)
A) Chablis.
B) Moselle.
C) Champagne.
D) Port.
E) Rough red.

2 What do the letters 'NV' stand for on the label of a bottle of champagne?
A) Nil Value.
B) They're short for 'eNVy'.
C) Non-vintage.
D) Non-vitro (ie not fermented in glass).

3 'Calling Number Display', or CND, is a service proposed for our telephone system. What does it mean?
A) A display on your phone will show you the telephone number of the person calling you.
B) A display on your phone will keep track of the number of calls you have made in that billing period.
C) A number of callers can phone you at once.

4 Many countries now have labelling systems to help consumers find products which are more likely to be 'environmentally friendly' than competitive products. Can you match the name of the scheme (on the left) with its country of operation (on the right)?

A) Environmental Choice	1) Germany
B) EcoMark	2) Canada
C) Blue Angel	3) Japan



5 You can buy a mobile phone to work on either the analogue or digital network. Which network is being phased out by the end of the year 2000?
A) Analogue.
B) Digital.

6 Chess is a war game. But it's also a word investors will be hearing more about. What is this new CHESS?
A) A game that combines property investment with gourmet food and sex.
B) A computerised network for paperless share-trading.
C) An acronym for Combined Home Equity Saving Scheme.

7 In what locations around the home shouldn't you put an ionisation smoke detector? (More than one answer is correct.)
A) The kitchen.
B) The laundry.
C) In a corner.
D) Near an outside light.

8 Three companies in Australia operate separate digital telephone networks using their own equipment and base stations. What are the three competing networks which will be wooing you?
A) Telecom, Optus and Tellus.
B) Optus, Vodafone and Optecom.
C) Telecom, Optus and Vodafone.

9 What major change in regulation regarding life insurance brochures took place in 1994?
A) They must stop using irrelevant titles like 'Umbrella Investment Plan' and 'Lifestyle Protection Plan'.
B) The sales commission must be disclosed.
C) The sales commission must no longer be disclosed.

ANSWERS

1. A, B, C and **D.** We can keep **E**. Many others will have to go too.
2. C.
3. A.
4. A/2; B/3; C/1.
5. A.
6. B. It is an acronym for Clearing House Electronic Sub-register System (romantic, isn't it?). This computerised system has been in use by the Australian Stock Exchange for documenting share transfers (selling and buying), since September this year.
7. A, B, C and **D.** An outside light attracts flying insects which may get inside the smoke detector, whereas steam or humidity from kitchen, bathroom and laundry appliances or hot water will also set off the alarm. This happens because an ionisation alarm triggers whenever something (such as smoke particles) interferes with a flow of electric current. In a corner, air circulation may miss it.
8. C.
9. B. The change was introduced on January 1, 1994. See August CHOICE for a report on how it's going.

RECALLS AND BANS

If you find a recall or ban not on our list, please let us know. Companies often rent 008 or 1800 numbers for a couple of months after the recall is announced. If the number given is no longer operating, phone the manufacturer or retailer direct.

A collapsible, non-layback, umbrella stroller, sold through Chicken Feed Bargain Stores during June and July 1994, has been recalled as the buckle may release under minimal pressure, thus rendering the harness ineffective in restraining any occupant. The stroller fabric has a striped background with various-coloured cloud patterns. Return to retailer or phone (02) 830 6777 for refund.

CHOICE

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Registered office: 57 Carrington Road, Marrickville NSW 2204
Telephone: (02) 558 0099 **Fax:** (02) 558 9341
Subscription enquiries: (02) 558 8088 **Consumer Information Service:** (02) 559 9855

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